

Al-Ahram

Weekly

No. 261

Published in Cairo by AL-AHRAM established in 1875

22 - 28 February 1996

16 Pages

P.T.50

Failed coup

QATARI Foreign Minister Sheikh Hamad bin Jassan Al-Thani yesterday accused the ousted former Emir of masterminding a failed counter-coup against the Emir who seized power from him last year.

The minister charged that Sheikh Khalifa bin Hamad Al-Thani, who is living in the neighbouring United Arab Emirates, ordered Saturday's aborted coup against the new Emir, Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al-Thani. He said Sheikh Khalifa may also have had the support of other Gulf Arab states.

According to AFP, it was planned that at least 40 soldiers and policemen, led by their officers, would begin an attack on the Emir's palace and the foreign and interior ministries with rocket-propelled grenades. Mercenaries, including the former French police captain Paul Barril, who has worked as a bodyguard for Sheikh Khalifa for years, were to have joined them later for the capture of the buildings.

Defector back

L.T. GEN. Hussein Kamel Al-Majid, the most senior Iraqi official among the group which defected six months ago, returned home on Tuesday, ending a bizarre exile in Jordan during which he had vowed to topple President Saddam Hussein, his fallacious law.

Al-Majid, headed from Amman to Baghdad in a 25-vehicle convoy, across the desert highway, spanning Jordan and Iraq after apparently negotiating safe passage from the Iraqi leader. Baghdad's state-run television said Saddam had agreed to allow Al-Majid to return after the defector pleaded for a pardon on Saturday.

Militants held

SECURITY forces in the southern governorate of Assiut have arrested 32 members of the underground Al-Gama'a Al-Islamiya organisation, suspected of involvement in two attacks on Monday and Tuesday that resulted in the death of nine people, police sources said.

In another development, authorities yesterday questioned 46 members of the outlawed Muslim Brotherhood in connection with an alleged plan to use Tuesday's Eid Al-Fitr prayers to incite the public. Security sources said that 36 of those detained had been arrested in the governorate of Fayoum, southwest of Cairo, and the remaining 10 in Cairo and Giza. Large numbers of leaflets, as well as knives and iron chains, were seized. (See p.2)

Eilat quake

A TREMOR registering 5.4 on the Richter scale jolted Israelis as they got out of bed yesterday morning, but there were no immediate reports of damage or injury. The tremor occurred at 7am and its epicentre was 120km south of the Red Sea resort of Eilat, according to Yossi Yafeh of the Institute for Petroleum Research and Geophysics.

Yesterday's tremor was also felt in Egypt. Dr. Hani Debes, chairman of the Astronomy and Geophysics Research Institute, said it registered 5.2 on the Richter scale.

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Sprint for privatisation

The government puts its privatisation apparatus in full gear, while the market cautiously waits. Ghada Ragab analyses the causes and effects of last week's decisions

After about four years of moving at a snail's pace, Egypt's controversial privatisation programme needed a shake-up. With only a handful of companies sold off and a few others being offered in the form of shares on the stock exchange according to an irregular schedule, the government found that, more or less, it was still carrying the same burden it set out to shed four years ago.

Despite continued criticism from international organisations involved in the economic reform programme, start-up failures, technical problems, the lack of willing buyers and the constraints imposed by a labour force of over one million, held up the privatisation programme.

So while the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank and the United States Agency for International Development repeated their advice to the administration to speed up privatisation, the government proceeded in its own good time. Many times, President Hosni Mubarak publicly announced that privatisation would not be allowed to infringe on social or national priorities, promising that no workers would be laid off as a result of privatisation.

Kamal El-Ganzouri's cabinet took the bull by the horns last week, announcing sweeping decisions to sell a number of major public enterprises immediately, and offer stakes in dozens of others on the stock exchange. However, experts say more concrete steps are needed to shake the market into action.

In a move that constitutes a rethinking and re-scheduling of the programme as a whole, Public Sector Minister Ataf Ebeid last week announced new selling regulations. In a tacit admission that bad management was the major reason why the public sector has not been responding to government efforts to improve the financial standing of the companies before selling them, Ebeid also announced that about half the members of the boards of directors of the enterprises would be replaced after the Eid holiday.

Fourteen industrial companies, which are wholly state-owned and which have already been evaluated, will be sold to individual Egyptian or foreign buyers in full, in a public tender. The list includes the Egyptian Food Company (Biscuits), Milk Dairy Products, Al-Nasr Engineering and Refrigeration (Koldair) and Egypt Free Shops. Ebeid attributed the choice of these companies to the fact that they belong to sectors in which the private sector is involved and their products do not have an effect on national or economic security.

Companies the sale of which by Ebeid include the cement producer to develop the activities of the company, cement production towards exports and retain all workers. Ebeid also announced that 42 companies would be sold in public, these offers through the stock exchange.

On the cabinet's privatisation list are giant public sector retailers such as Omar Effendi and Sebnawi, as well as 27 hotels and nine Nile cruise ships.

Although these companies have been on the government's privatisation list since the inception of the programme, observers say this is the first time the government publicly announces it will sell off specific hotels, wholesale.

According to Mohamed Bekir, head of the privatisation unit of the Holding Company for Tourism, Housing and Cinema, the revised programme sets new priorities for the sale of public sector hotels.

"We have excluded the hotels and companies which

have a cultural or historical value," he said. These have been named as the Mena House Oberoi Hotel, the Aswan Cataract Hotel, the Luxor Winter Palace and the Marial Palace Hotel.

Although the time schedule for the sale of these companies is still being set out, Bekir says he expects some of these hotels to go within the year. However, enterprises which need restructuring before sale will take much longer.

Also under consideration by the holding company are plans to merge some companies into entities that are more economically viable.

The cabinet's announcement also emphasised that it would sell the shares of public sector banks in joint ventures, a move which Banque Misr Chairman Essam El-Ahmedi says is not new to the banking sector.

El-Ahmedi said that the banks would also continue to play a significant role in evaluating public sector assets and in publicising share offers and managing the actual sales of public sector shares.

The government, however, might have to call upon the banks to play one more role in privatisation. In last week's announcement, Minister Ebeid suggested that the government might have to write off part of the public sector's staggering \$80 billion debt to the banks to be able to sell the companies. While some market experts suggest that these "bad" debts might as well be forgiven to enable these companies to survive, opponents say a write-off implies a steep price to pay for the creditor banks.

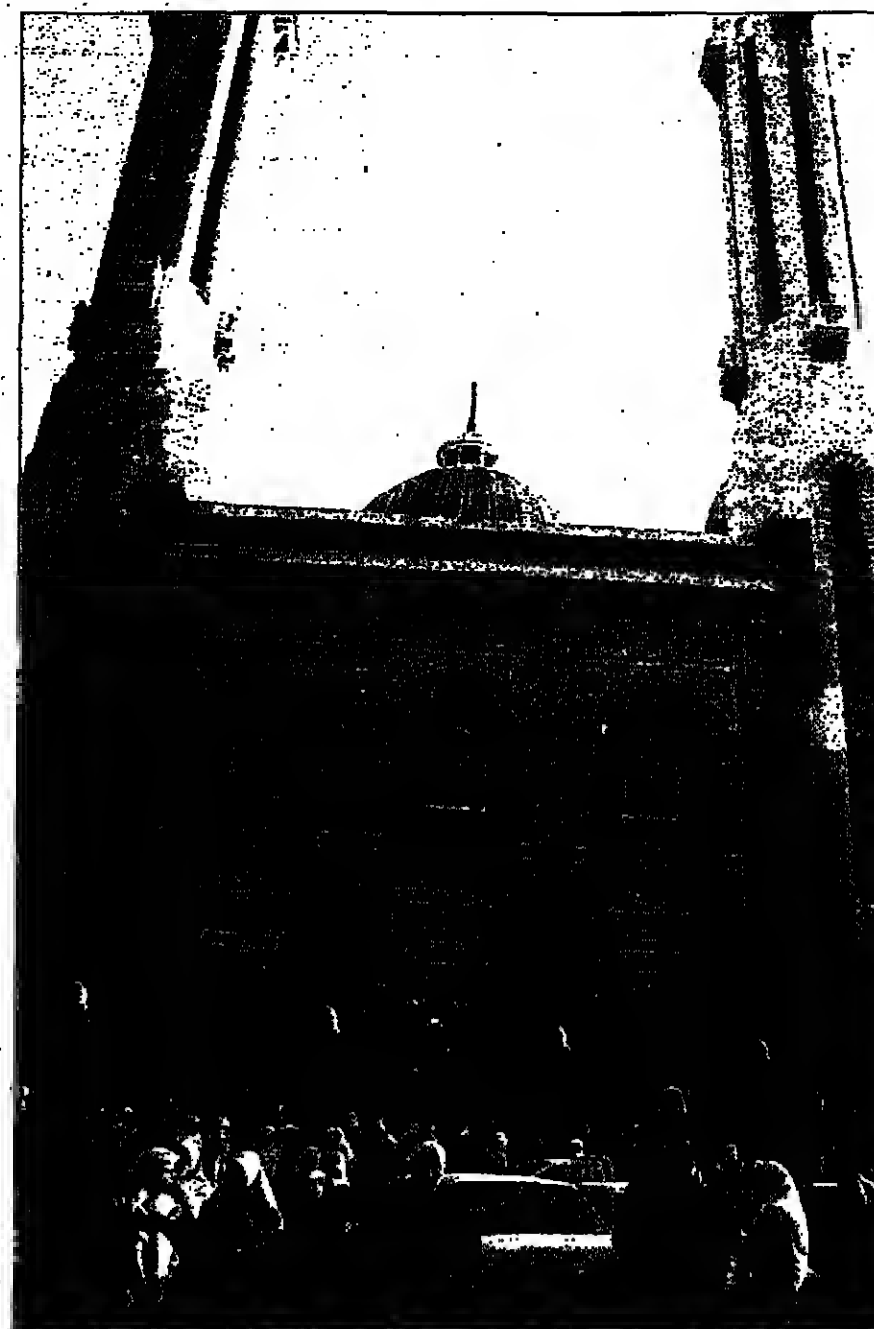
At the stock market, hungry for new shares since a lull in public share offers created a slow-down in the market for the past few months, the government's new privatisation plans fell on eager ears.

"It's good, but we need more details," said Mohamed Taymour, chairman of the Egyptian Financial Group, a brokerage and fund management company. "It looks more serious this time; they seem to be re-shuffling the old schedule and resetting their priorities. The stock market is prepared, and investors will take an interest if these announcements are translated into the actual selling of companies," he said.

Alaa Saba, of Hermes Financial, which has managed a number of public share offers, says he was "thrilled" to hear of the government's plans to push ahead with privatisation. Saba says that the government's decision to allow more than 50 per cent of public enterprises to be sold and the fact that the decisions come from the cabinet are two welcome signs, which give the announcement more credibility from the investors' point of view.

"There is enough money in the system, but it may not be invested in the capital market right now," Saba said. "This is because investors have not seen decisions come to fruition, but these funds are not static. They will change direction when investors are convinced that the government is serious."

Its future effects on the local markets notwithstanding, the move to push ahead with privatisation can only help the cabinet in its upcoming talks with the IMF team of negotiators, scheduled to arrive in Cairo at the end of this month. At stake is the much-awaited write-off of \$4 billion in debts, the last tranche of debt relief awarded by the Paris Club of creditor nations to Egypt in 1991, delayed partly because of IMF experts' dissatisfaction with the pace of privatisation. (see p.2)



Invoking God at dawn

OVER 5,000 Muslims filled the spacious courtyard of Al-Nour Mosque in the heart of Abbassya Square in Cairo on Tuesday to perform Eid Al-Fitr prayers. Ghada Ragab attended.

Though the mosque is one of the largest in Cairo, its space was still not enough to accommodate everyone and latecomers had to pray on the mosque's steps outside. Two years ago, worshippers performed their prayers on the construction site amidst heaps of cement and building blocks.

Al-Nour officially opened last year, but its story stretches back over 20 years, when Sheikh Hafez Salama of Suez started its construction in 1973. The construction of both the mosque and the adjoining Islamic centre was taken over by the government after the site became a political platform for Sheikh Salama and his anti-government followers, and lectures began to deviate from religious subjects.

Over the last decade, efforts to complete construction were hampered by a lack of financial resources. When the magnificent mosque finally saw the light of day, over LE40 million had been spent on its construction. It contains a separate section for women, a space for teaching and a hall for weddings. The adjoining centre offers a number of medical and educational services to citizens.

Since its completion, its popularity as a religious and social centre has increased. This year President Hosni Mubarak attended noon prayers on the last Friday of Ramadan (a special day in the Islamic faith) at the mosque. Tuesday's sermon, given by Sheikh Mohamed El-Sawy, stressed that the values Ramadan instilled in those who fasted should be adhered to not just during the holy month, but all year round. (see p.13)



photos: Jihan Ammar

New light on ancient history

A new find at Abu Sir, which provides fresh information on the final stages of pyramid construction, may also shed new light on an obscure chapter of Egypt's ancient history. Omayma Abdel-Latif investigates

Workers at the funerary complex of the Fifth Dynasty pharaoh, King Sahure, at Abu Sir, 12 kilometres south of Giza, were cleaning and restoring the monument recently when they began to uncover inscriptions on the walls of the causeway leading to the valley temple. After the dust was removed from the walls, the workers came across what Zahi Hawwas, director of the Giza Plateau, described as a "most significant find": twenty stone blocks carved in ancient Egyptian hieroglyphs, according to Hawwas, some of these scenes were "truly surprising", and provided fresh information about an obscure chapter of ancient history.

But while Hawwas maintains that the new find may cause that chapter to be re-written, other archaeologists described his claim as an exaggeration.

The Sahure Pyramid is the most important funerary complex of Abu Sir's 11 pyramids. The most striking feature in this complex was a drainage pipe which ran the whole length of the causeway for a distance of 300 metres. The funerary temple contains granite and limestone columns with capitals in the form of lotus buds or palm fronds.

The Palermo stone records that Sahure sent an expedition to Punt (Somalia) which brought back 8,000 measures of myrrh, 6,000 units of weight of gold and 2,600 slaves of ebony. He also sent some military expeditions to fight against the Asiatics, as represented on the walls of his pyramid temple.

Hawwas reported that two of the newly-discovered scenes depicted the arrival of the pyramid (the cap-stone of a pyramid), indicating that construction work had been completed. According to Ali Hassan of the Supreme Council of Antiquities, a "unique" scene shows King Sahure standing before a group of workers who are pulling the pyramidion with a rope. The inscriptions above the scene indicate that the pyramidion was made of gold, evidence at variance with other archaeologists' theories that the ancient Egyptians used electrum—an alloy of gold and silver. The other scene shows groups of men and women celebrating the completion of the pyramid's construction, with archers shooting arrows and wrestlers fighting.

According to Hassan, the scenes prove that "for ancient Egyptians, building a pyramid was a national project. They also reveal that the pyramidion constituted the last phase of construction, because celebrations are held afterwards."

A third scene, also deemed significant, depicted skinny and scrawny figures with hieroglyphic text describing them as Bedouins, the first time such a reference has been found on ancient Egyptian inscriptions. This scene has sparked a controversy among Egyptologists. According to Hawwas, the inscription explains that the Bedouins had been deliberately left to starve to

death as a punishment for raiding a royal mission sent to bring blocks of stone for the pyramid's construction.

A similar depiction of emaciated figures had earlier been found on the causeway of the funerary complex of King Omas, the last pharaoh of the Fifth Dynasty. That scene was interpreted by the late Egyptologist Selim Hassan, in a book published in 1938, as indicating that a great famine had hit the country around 4200 BC, killing thousands of Egyptians. Other archaeologists followed in Hassan's footsteps, adopting his interpretation of the scene.

But Hawwas argued that the newly-discovered scene proves that the famine theory is incorrect, and that "this chapter of ancient history should be revised as a result."

However, other Egyptologists interviewed by Al-Ahram Weekly expressed reservations. Ali Radwan, former dean of Cairo University's Faculty of Archaeology, said the discovery was an "old find made new". It is common knowledge, Radwan added, that ancient Egypt was hit repeatedly by famines. In any case, he added, "the famine mentioned by Selim Hassan in his book does not have major significance because it did not stretch over a long period of Egyptian history."

Touha Handousa, head of the Egyptology Department at Cairo University, had similar doubts. "The text which was discovered refers in Bedouins, but does it elaborate on the reasons why they were held captive?" she asked. Handousa believes that a more in-depth study should be made to ascertain that the scrawny figures were actually Bedouins and not Egyptians starving as a result of famine.

A foreign Egyptologist, who asked that his name be withheld, believes the find is of "great significance" because "it was generally believed that the Fifth Dynasty was a period of decline, since the pyramids built by its pharaohs were small in size and of inferior quality in comparison to the great pyramids of neighbouring Giza. But it was a dominant architectural feature of the Fifth Dynasty that the funerary complex, in addition to the small pyramid, also contained a mortuary temple which was well-constructed and adorned with reliefs, and a sun temple with a causeway leading to the valley temple."

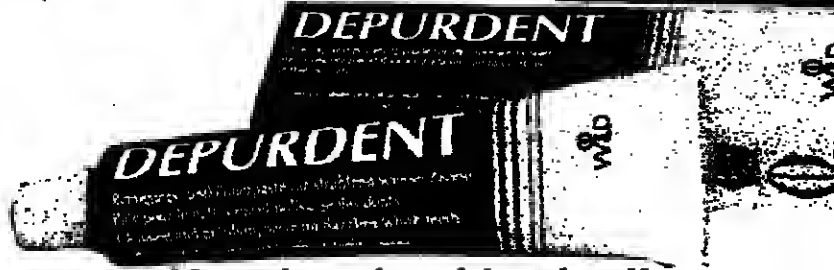
Hawwas said that out of 94 pyramids which have been found so far, the causeways of only five have been unearthed. "The most important is the one belonging to King Omas. Unearthing another one at Abu Sir is an important event," he said.

Abu Sir, home to 11 pyramids, has been closed to the public while restoration work continues on its monuments and roads leading to the area undergo repairs. According to Hawwas, the area will be re-opened to the public in June.

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Holding council with the opposition

Political party leaders are encouraged that the prime minister continues to show an interest in their views on government policy, writes **Nevine Khalil**



El-Ganzouri, at the head of the conference table, listens to opinions from across the political spectrum during Sunday's meeting.

Continuing a policy initiated when he took office last month, Prime Minister Kamal El-Ganzouri met opposition party leaders on Sunday for consultations on the government's privatisation drive and a new law governing local (municipal) council elections. The two-hour meeting, which brought together over 20 figures from across the political spectrum, was also attended by the ministers of agriculture, information, justice, local administration and parliamentary affairs.

The meeting came exactly one month after El-Ganzouri, who formed his cabinet on 4 January, held his first consultations with opposition leaders. That meeting was greeted with scepticism by some opposition figures, who described it as a "public relations exercise" and a "one-shot affair". But, encouraged by the fact that a second meeting actually materialised, participants are now inclined

to believe that it will become an "unwritten rule" that consultations be held on a regular monthly basis.

"The meeting was positive, and showed that the government really wants to know our opinion," commented Rifaat El-Said, secretary-general of the leftist Tagammu Party. Mustafa Kamel Murad, leader of the Liberal Party, described it as "a very good step. We all had the chance to express our views."

Murad even suggested that the meetings be broadcast on television, so that ordinary people could become acquainted with the various views on any given subject.

Information Minister Safwat El-Sherif told reporters that El-Ganzouri and the opposition leaders had reviewed the government's economic development policy, including the removal of obstacles

hindering investment, horizontal and vertical agricultural expansion and the promotion of tourism.

The government's position on a new local council election law was presented by Mahmoud El-Sherif, minister of local administration.

A new law became necessary when the old law, which combined the state and individual candidacy systems, was declared unconstitutional by the Supreme Constitutional Court. The minister said that the incumbent councils would be frozen and replaced by interim five-member councils until new elections were held, on the basis of individual candidacy, within nine months. Opposition leaders supported the return to the individual candidacy system. El-Ganzouri requested them to submit their recommendations and remarks in writing prior to a 28 February cabinet meeting which will discuss the details of the new law.

"The prime minister is a good listener," commented Tagammu's El-Said after the meeting. He added that some participants had branched out into other topics, because there were many issues to discuss, but El-Ganzouri asked them to focus on the subjects at hand.

However, a certain level of scepticism remained, with some opposition figures claiming that the government's sincerity would be proved only when it actually incorporated their views into legislation. El-Said objected to the fact that the government's privatisation plan came up for discussion after, and not before, it was announced by the government. "It made sense that they would want to know our views on the local council elections but not on the recent moves on privatisation," he said.

The Liberal Party's Murad, however, was con-

fident that the opposition would have the opportunity to participate in further economic policy decision-making. "There will be more to come regarding the economy and we will be ready to take part," he said.

Yassin Serageddin, leader of the Wafd's parliamentary group, agreed that the opposition should be kept informed of any proposed legislation, before, rather than after, it was passed. "We should be notified beforehand because lawmakers can benefit greatly from our opinions," he said.

However, Serageddin was positive about the government's motives. "The prime minister said that opposition parties are part of the system and share the same responsibilities towards the people," he said. The meetings, he believes, are a genuine attempt to include them in the decision-making process.

Opposition objects to privatisation

Leftist and Islamist-oriented political parties sounded the alarm this week after the government announced plans to put a large number of public sector companies up for sale. The anger and disappointment voiced by the leftist Tagammu and Nasserist parties and the Islamist-leaning Labour Party had been expected, because their platforms pledged unwavering support to the public sector as the backbone of the Egyptian economy. But even leaders of the liberal Wafd, which supports private enterprise, described the sale procedures as discouraging and expressed fears about a large infiltration of foreign capital.

Adel Hussein, Labour's secretary-general, said the privatisation programme was a response to pressures put on the government by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the United States. "For them, privatisation means selling a massive amount of stock to foreigners at very cheap prices, after the Egyptian pound is devalued to bring the prices further down," he said. "The type of companies put up for sale as well as the sale procedure do not guarantee production or labour growth. In fact the opposite should be expected."

Hussein rejected the government's assertion that strategic enterprises related to national security would be excluded from privatisation. "The government is planning to sell its share in joint venture banks and, for any economist, banks are strategic enterprises," he said.

The Nasserist Party said it was considering the possibility of filing a lawsuit to block the sale on the grounds that it violated the constitution. Nasserists oppose privatisation on principle, said party leader Diaeddin Dawoud. "We oppose the sale of the public sector, which was built with the blood and efforts of thousands of Egyptians in their struggle for independence. How can the government simply let go, just like that?" he asked.

Dawoud claimed that public sector companies had been making a good profit until the economic open door policy was introduced in the early 1970s. "The fact that it has survived from 1971 up till now, despite unfair competition from imported commodities and the drop in the value of the Egyptian pound, is proof that the pub-

lic sector is in good health," he said. Privatisation, he maintained, would turn Egypt into a "satellite economy". The country would become "a neo-productive, consumer society like the Gulf countries, but with one difference — they have oil and we don't."

Responding to the government's assertion that some public sector companies had accumulated massive losses and debts, Dawoud said any financial irregularities should have been investigated and those responsible put on trial. "But for an unknown reason, the government did not do that and simply decided to sell off the whole thing."

Meanwhile, the Tagammu Party issued a statement declaring that privatisation would "waste away the wealth accumulated by the sacrifice, blood and sweat of the Egyptian people for over a century in favour of a group of foreigners and exploiters."

The rush for privatisation would result only in a "further deterioration of economic and social conditions leading to the impoverishment of the Egyptian people... to serve the interests of a group of foreign exploiters, a minority of Egyptian parasite capitalists and their corrupt bureaucratic partners."

The party's statement claimed that many of the enterprises being put up for sale were profitable and some of them, such as joint venture banks and the aluminium industry complex, had strategic importance. And, since Egyptian capitalists preferred to invest in real estate, the most likely outcome of the policy was that foreigners will acquire the ownership of these companies.

Putting so many companies up for sale was bound to result in a drop in their selling price and the dismissal of thousands of workers, the statement added.

Speaking to *Al-Ahram Weekly*, Tagammu leader Khaled Mohieddin was less harsh. "We are against the sale of public sector companies, but if the government says that some of them are accumulating massive losses, why keep them?" he asked. "The government has repeatedly said that privatisation is an economic necessity. It is a matter of viewpoint. But the question is: why sell the profitable enterprises?"

Even leaders of the Wafd Party, a strong advocate of private enterprise, were not happy with the government's plan. Ibrahim Dessouki Abaza, the party's assistant secretary-general, said that while the Wafd encouraged the principle of privatisation, the sale procedures being adopted were "not encouraging" and "very ambiguous." And although the government had been talking about privatisation for years, "we still don't know exactly what the government wants to sell and what it won't sell, as if it were all a big secret."

The inability of Egyptian capital to buy these enterprises was another discouraging factor, Abaza commented. And Yassin Serageddin, leader of the Wafd's parliamentary group, expressed concern that the presence of foreign purchasers meant that companies would be sold at "unrealistically high prices." While stressing that the Wafd was not opposed to "clean" foreign investment, Serageddin warned about the "infiltration we all know about" — an apparent allusion to Israeli capital.

Abaza co-occurred that the Wafd had no objection to foreign investment, but was concerned that sales to foreign companies would be likely to result in high prices for the consumer, which Egyptians would not be able to afford. One possible solution, he suggested, was to encourage investment from Egyptian expatriates, whose wealth is estimated at LE174 billion. The combined value of companies put up for sale does not exceed LE70 billion. "We've decided to contact some of these expatriates and persuade them to buy into the privatised industries," he said.

Rift within Nasserist Party

Diaeddin Dawoud is facing a rebellion from a younger generation of Nasserists to remove him from the leadership of the Nasserist Arab Democratic Party. **Khaled Dawoud investigates**

The followers of Gamal Abdel-Nasser have been involved in internal squabbling since the late 1970s, when attempts were first made to establish a Nasserist party.

Although two of these attempts, made by diaeddin Nasserists, ended in failure, Diaeddin Dawoud, a cabinet minister under Nasser, eventually won a court order in 1992 sanctioning the birth of his Nasserist Arab Democratic Party. An agreement was later reached to unite all Nasserist factions under the Nasserist Party's banner, but prominent Nasserists continued to fight among themselves over ideology and power.

The differences were kept under wraps for nearly three years, but they recently exploded into the public domain with an exchange of accusations and counter-accusations.

With only a few weeks to go before the Nasserist Party's central committee is scheduled to meet on 6 March, a group of younger Nasserists have staged a rebellion against Dawoud, accusing him of inefficiency, deviating from the party's ideology, suppressing opposition and leaning in the government's direction.

The last week, the party's leadership decided to lay off 10 young reporters, also party members, who have been working without contracts for the party's weekly mouthpiece, *Al-Arabi*. Dawoud's opponents claimed the dismissal was a political decision. Dawoud denied this, maintaining that "only qualified journalists should work for *Al-Arabi*. Being a party member does not give licence to make money out of its newspaper without being able to produce good quality journalism."

The dismissals came shortly after reports circulated that the party's ideological education committee, headed by Amin Iskandar, leader of the rebellion, had been frozen on Dawoud's orders.

Speaking to *Al-Ahram Weekly*, Dawoud conceded "differences" inside the party, but downplayed the rebellion, saying that such differences were a healthy phenomenon. "Parties should not be rigid structures with one viewpoint dominating the entire group," he maintained. "They should be alive, and should contain different strands of opinion." He denied that the differences amounted to a split in party ranks, and claimed he enjoyed the support of the majority of members.

Dawoud denied freezing the education committee. "If anyone is to be blamed for its weak performance, it is Iskandar himself. He has done nothing to activate it since he took over the chairmanship more than a year ago," he said.

Dawoud, who is 69, ridiculed Iskandar's claim to be leader of an uprising by a younger generation of Nasserists, people who had not occupied official positions under the late president, who died in 1970. Iskandar, 42, maintains that "since Nasser's death there has been a clear division between those who served under him and another generation which was brought up in an anti-Nasserist climate under [President Anwar] El-Sadat."

The two schools have different understandings of Nasserism. The older generation agreed to the gov-

ernment's offer to become part of a political backdrop that would justify its claim that there is true democracy in this country. But we believe in the Nasserist ideology that a wide-scale change, led by the people, is necessary." Dawoud denied the existence of such a division, claiming that those who used such slogans were motivated by a lust for power and a desire to gain control of the party. True Nasserists, whether young or old, he said, share the same ideology.

"All those who keep referring to a division between 'young' and 'old' are themselves over 40. Can they really be called young people?" Dawoud asked. "And if they are young people, then what about university students and others in their 20s and 30s? Even if we acknowledge that the older generation is in control of the party, then those who differ with us should present something impressive if they want to earn the support of the majority of party members."

According to Iskandar, splits between the generations were not confined to the Nasserist Party, but was a wider problem. "Leaders of all opposition parties are over 70, if not 80," he said. "As a younger generation, with a gap of at least 30 years between us, we are denied the opportunity of participating in decision-making."

In its present shape, Iskandar does not believe that the Nasserist Party represents a true opposition to the government. "The best proof is that the circulation of *Al-Arabi*, which stood at 100,000 when it first appeared, has dropped to 18,000."

Iskandar said he represented not only a younger generation but also a more hawkish position, opposing the government and its policies of privatisation, close cooperation with the United States and normalisation of relations with Israel.

According to Iskandar, Dawoud's camp manages to prevail within the party because of the control which he, and a few others, exercise over party finances and because of the authority he has over the appointment of top officials. "We [the younger generation] represent no less than 60 per cent of the party's general assembly, but none of us made it to the politburo [the party's highest body] through election." Iskandar became a member of the politburo a year ago, but only because a member had died and Iskandar had won the second highest number of votes.

Another of the rebellion's "young" leaders is Hamdin El-Sabahi, also in his early 40s. Sabahi, who recently gained a seat on the politburo after another member resigned, won a substantial number of votes in the recent parliamentary elections, although not enough to win a seat in the People's Assembly. Iskandar charged that the party leadership "did not provide him with any kind of support."

But despite his opposition to the party leadership, Iskandar asserted that the party "was not heading for a split". However, he added, "since we feel that we are the majority, we will struggle in the coming general assembly, scheduled for the end of this year, to oust Dawoud from the leadership."

New surge of violence

IN A NEW upsurge of violence coinciding with the end of the holy month of Ramadan, 11 people were killed on Monday and Tuesday in three separate attacks in the southern governorates of Al-Minya and Assiut.

In the worst incident, blamed on militants involved in a feud with a rival family, seven people were killed in the area of Al-Badri in the Assiut governorate on Monday night. Some of the dead were innocent bystanders or pedestrians who were felled by gunfire as they shopped for the *Eid*.

A security source said the identities of three gunmen had been established. They were named as Mohamed Abdel-Rahman Salama, Ala'a Abdel-Razek and Tamer Abdallah Hegazi. The three, who were described as terrorists, belong to the Salama family, which is involved in a vendetta with

another family called El-Hadaya.

Bent on vengeance, the three sprayed a sidewalk cafe with automatic rifle fire, instantly killing Kamel Abdallah Abdel-Gawad, a civil servant, and Ahmed Hassan Abdel-Gawad, a farmer — both members of the El-Hadaya family. Police sergeant Khalifa Ali Yassin, who happened to be inside the cafe with some of his friends, was also killed.

As the three assailants attempted to escape, Ali Ahmed Mesbah, a police guard, tried to stop them. They shot him dead.

Meanwhile, pedestrians and shoppers had gathered to give chase to the gunmen. The latter reacted by opening fire randomly, killing three other men, before taking refuge in nearby fields.

Large numbers of security personnel ar-

rived at the scene of the crime and combed the area, using armoured vehicles and amphibious craft, in search of the escaped gunmen.

Also on Monday, two terrorists were killed in a shootout with security forces near Mallawi, a hotbed of Islamist militants, in the governorate of Al-Minya. A security source said the two terrorists had opened fire at a police ambush and were killed when the forces returned their fire. The authorities were still trying to establish their identities because the identity papers found on the bodies turned out to be forgeries.

On Tuesday, gunmen opened fire at residents of the village of Tasa in the governorate of Assiut, killing two Christian brothers and seriously wounding a third, a security source said.

Fair doors remain shut to Israel

Israel's exclusion from the Cairo International Book Fair highlights Egyptian intellectuals' unrelenting objection to cultural cooperation with the Israelis. **Kania Khalaf reports**

For the 11th consecutive year, Israel has been barred from taking part in the Cairo International Book Fair, which opens its doors to the public on Saturday — an indication of the continuing objection of Egyptian intellectuals to the normalisation of cultural relations between the two countries.

Yacoub Setti, press counsellor at the Israeli Embassy, told *Al-Ahram Weekly* that he had "conveyed Israel's request to participate in the fair personally to Samir Sarhan, chairman of the General Book Organisation, and I also presented an official written application to the diplomatic authorities."

Israel's participation in the book fair would have been an important step, he said, in view of progress made in regional peacemaking, notably agreements with Jordan and the Palestine Liberation Organisation, and ongoing negotiations with Syria.

"I don't understand why our application was turned down by the Egyptian authorities. Progress in the peace talks should be accompanied by a dif-

ferent attitude on the part of the Arab countries," he said. "Culture is an important tool in promoting peaceful ties between Israel and the Arab states."

Sarhan denied that he had received an application from Israel. But he nevertheless acknowledged that "intellectuals still reject the normalisation of cultural relations between Egypt and Israel," and that this view was reflected by the Ministry of Culture. Samir Khalil, general manager of the exhibitions department at the General Book Organisation, described Israel's exclusion as a "political decision."

Setti said he respected the Egyptian position. However, he added, "It is only natural for Israel to take part in such an important book fair. I don't see any difference between the participation of Israel and of any other country. After two and a half years of peacemaking with the Palestinians and Jordanians, there is a new atmosphere prevailing in the region. Promoting cultural relations could help in promoting this peaceful atmosphere."

Ali Salem, a playwright who advocates cooperation with Israel, also noted the improvement in the political climate. He argued that strong Arab-Israeli relations in all spheres were necessary to promote regional stability. He not only recommended Israeli participation in the book fair, but also Egyptian participation in Israeli cultural events, advocating that Egyptian intellectuals "should become acquainted with Israeli culture in its various domains: literature, cinema and theatre."

Setti maintained that, while Egyptian intellectuals gave Israeli culture the cold shoulder, there is a lot of interest in Israel in translating Arabic poetry and fiction into Hebrew. "Intellectuals are keen on playing an influential role in mobilising public opinion in support of the peace process," he said.

Novelist Gamal El-Ghuni, who is also chief editor of the literary periodical *Akhbar Al-Adab* (Literary News), drew a distinction between "becoming acquainted with Israeli culture," on the one hand, and

"accepting cultural relations on Israel's terms," on the other. Israel, he added, was seeking to dictate a kind of peace that would ensure its preeminence in the area.

Intellectuals, El-Ghuni said, were unable to digest the idea of Israel's participation in such an important cultural event as the Cairo International Book Fair while it continued to occupy Arab land. "How can Israel think of normalising cultural relations while it continues to act as an occupier?" he asked.

In his view, Israel's participation in the book fair should be linked to the achievement of a comprehensive peace in the region, including the establishment of an independent Palestinian state.

The issue of the killing of Egyptian prisoners of war by their Israeli captors in 1956 and 1967 is scheduled for debate at the fair's "cultural café" — a gathering to discuss topical subjects. According to an official at the General Book Organisation, Is-

raeli authorities have conveyed their opposition to this seminar to the Egyptian ambassador in Tel Aviv, on the grounds that the alleged killings were being investigated by an Israeli commission of inquiry.

Israel took part in the book fair only once — in 1985 — but its participation triggered protest demonstrations by university students. Nevertheless, Salem predicted that it was "only a matter of time before intellectuals accept the normalisation of cultural relations with Israel." El-Ghuni disagreed. "The majority of Egyptian intellectuals oppose the idea," he said. "We cannot put the history of past conflicts behind us and look forward to cultural ties. It is not that simple." (see p. 10)

Edited by **Wadie Kirolos**

Driving on borrowed time

Neither a borrower nor a lender be, notes an old adage. For banks and their clients, this is proving to be the case with regard to car loans, writes Niveen Wahish

Nora Mohamed, a secretary at an import-export company, had dreamt of owning a new car for years. But, like many Egyptians, the idea of paying for it in cash, up front, was as much a dream as actually buying the car.

Two years ago, however, Egyptian banks introduced a car loan programme enabling consumers to purchase new cars on an instalment basis. For Mohamed, this was the break she was waiting for. "If it wasn't for the credit system, I wouldn't have been able to afford this car."

This, however, is not only a tale of realising a dream. The price for Mohamed, and many like her, has been high. "Buying the car has cost me a lot," she said. "I've been paying LE900 per month for two years and still have one year of payments to go." While these instalments have allowed her to afford buying the car, she has found that she is paying about LE10,000 in interest over the retail value of the car. In retrospect, she noted, had the cash to purchase the car been available, "I would have paid it in one lump sum."

Mohamed is one of the lucky ones who has been able to meet her monthly payments. Others have found the instalments too high and, as a result, have defaulted. Banks, who had extended these loans, are now beginning to re-evaluate the system and the wisdom behind it.

The new credit system was introduced two years ago as a way of allowing consumers the chance to purchase new cars while also boosting the auto market. Under this system, buyers would make a down payment to the car dealer and then begin to service their debt to the bank which had already paid the outstanding balance to the dealer. The terms of payment were a two-to-five year loan compounded at seven to eight per cent interest per year.

The increase in default on the loans, however, has many bank officials taking a second look at the system and demanding stricter guarantees and collateral covering the full value of the car before the loans are given to consumers.

According to Mona Qassem, head of Banque Misr's Research Unit, a number of banks began the car loan programmes in an effort to activate the stagnant liquidity accumulated through high interest rates on deposits. At the same time, these car loans would provide low-income individuals the chance to own a new car.

The programme, however, was not solely

administered by the banks. While the dealerships would hand over the car to the buyer after receiving the downpayment, the bank would pay the remainder to the dealership and collect from the buyer the outstanding value of the car in instalments. In this way, the bank guarantees the dealer the full value of the car and shoulders the risk.

"In a way," said Qassem, "this system increased business for the agents as well." Increasing rates of default, however, left banks in a precarious position. With little way of regaining their funds, the banks confiscated the cars—a solution which pleased none of the parties involved.

"What will the bank do with a large number of used cars," asked Qassem, adding, "In short, the idea of the loans was sound, the problem was with the implementation."

Hossam Abdel-Aal, manager of the Abdel-Aal Car Agency in downtown Cairo, agrees with Qassem. "There should have been more control by the banks," he said. Abdel-Aal has not incorporated the credit system into his sales, arguing that it entails copious amounts of paperwork. The problem, he maintains, is that the banks did not sufficiently investigate the credit histories of their clients. "Consequently, about 80 per cent of those who took out car loans defaulted," he said.

This spelled trouble not only for the banks, but more tangibly also for those who took out the loans. With their cars repossessed by the bank, the customers must first find a way to pay the outstanding principal plus interest. Since the title of the car was held by the banks until it was completely paid off, these customers could also not sell the car to pay off their debts.

Many banks such as Banque Misr have terminated the programme, but others such as the National Bank of Egypt (NBE) are confident that their approach and screening process is sound. "We do not plan to discontinue the programme in the near future," said Samir Gad, director general of the Credit Department at the NBE.

Gad explained that the bank conducts an in-depth analysis of a customer's credit history and ensures that the collateral is sufficient to cover any incident of default. "We look at each case individually, but the collateral agreement usually entails that the bank retains full ownership of the

car until it is paid off entirely," he said, adding that "customers are also required to insure the car."

"Banks today," he added, "are very careful to whom they extend credit, limiting the loans to traders or to individuals whose salaries more than adequately cover the monthly instalments," said Mohamed Gamal, a sales assistant at El-Rawas car agency which extends credit to potential buyers through an agreement with the Suez Canal Bank.

The terms of this arrangement require the client to pay a 30 per cent cash down payment to the dealership while the bank is responsible for the remaining 70 per

cent. Other banks are battling the default trend by tightening up credit policies—a practice which is causing potential buyers tremendous difficulties. Yehia Hussein, a 31-year old engineer, said that he has been trying to take out a car loan for over a year but, "something always went wrong."

The collateral demanded by the bank, he said, is not easy for buyers to secure. "For example, the bank requires customers to provide the contract of a registered piece of real estate as a guarantee, or in lieu of that, a bank deposit equaling half the value of the car. This sum will be held by the

bank until full payment has been rendered," he explained. Today's youth, Hussein stated, just aren't able to come up with these kinds of assets and often require a co-signer.

Despite these shortcomings, noted Banque Misr's Qassem, the credit system has been instrumental in creating a market for new cars where none had existed before.

Moreover, she said, the increased demand for new vehicles has encouraged international auto manufacturers to assemble their cars in Egypt, prompting the birth of a feeder industry. "Today, we export to neighbouring Arab countries and

to eastern Europe," Qassem said.

On the macro level, this kind of market is promising, but seemingly does little to address the day-to-day concerns of the average consumer who tends to view the issue from a micro-household perspective. But, says Qassem, "There's no going back now. Egyptian consumers will no longer accept used cars instead of new ones." Aiding consumers in their quest for new model automobiles should be the forces of supply and demand. "The increasing number and variety of new cars will cause prices to fall," she explained, making them more accessible to a large segment of society.

Start your engines — if you can

Al-Aqqad Market in Nasr City is a used car buyer's dream. But dreams, writes Mona El-Fiqi, sometimes leave a little to be desired



At first glance, the huge, barren plot of land on Ahmed Al-Zomor street in Nasr City resembles a stretch of desert encroaching upon the city — or, at the very least, a really dirty parking lot. But, on Friday and Sunday, this dusty stretch becomes a make-shift used car dealership as hundreds of car owners drive, or push, their vehicles, and jostle for the pole position to lure a buyer. It is, in virtually every sense, Nasr City's used car Field of Dreams, where the motto could well be, "If you park it, they will come."

The market, which is open from 10am to 7pm on Friday and Sunday, has been around since 1983, although not in the same place. What has been consistent, however, aside from the fact that a bargain can be had, is that while supporters of the market say that it eliminates the need for greedy middle-men, detractors say that it is, and

not a bargain that is often had. It is also, they maintain, an eyesore and a nuisance for the residents in the area.

Said Abdel-Rahman, an employee of the district who is commissioned to give the owners of the cars their LE1 day tickets, said, "I come to the market every Friday and Sunday to collect the ticket fee, but some of them refuse to pay, opting instead to stand away from the market and gather their own little crowd around them."

To help bring in a little order to what often turns into chaos, Said Hassan, the manager of the market, has requested that the district assign a police officer for security purposes. Although there are about 50 assistants helping out, he said, there are about 200 cars that are displayed here daily and often, "misunderstandings between the

buyers and sellers turn into fights."

Not everyone, however, is complaining. Shawqi Mohamed, has a fair bit of time on his hands and is in no real hurry to sell his car. In order to get the best price, he said, time and patience are of the essence. "I can come here for weeks on end," Mohamed said. "It costs me next to nothing to stand here all day, and it is a lot cheaper than placing an ad in the paper."

Another frequent customer at the market who wished to remain anonymous said that the best thing about the market is that the brokers are cut out of the picture. With no commissions or finder's fees to pay, the two parties can walk away happy. They would be a lot happier however, he said, if a police officer was assigned to help the owners organise the market a bit.

Now, what about the state

Liberalisation, argues Mona Qassem, does not necessarily imply a hand-off policy for the government

The formation of trade blocs, the conclusion of international trade agreements like the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) and a push for international economic liberalisation all, at first glance, spell trouble for the role of the state in economic planning. But, for developing countries like Egypt, conditions such as these do not preclude continued governmental involvement in economic policy formulation. Rather, they imply the re-defining of the state's role, with an eye on facilitating the transition while promoting long-term productivity in an increasingly free market environment.

For years, the Egyptian government shouldered the burden of managing the economy and, in the process, paid a heavy price. But with the introduction of Sadat's open-door policy in the mid-1970s, and the launching of the economic reform programme in 1991, the responsibilities previously borne by the government have been shifted to the private sector.

Moreover, the liberalisation of Egypt's fiscal, monetary, credit and pricing policies, in line with recommendations by institutions like the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank have also relieved the state of the burden of subsidies and price regulations.

To a great extent, the economic reform pro-

gramme of the early 1990s is responsible for attempting to mobilise market forces in every sector of the economy. The Public Enterprise Law of 1992 re-organised the public sector into holding companies which would operate on an economic rather than a socially-oriented basis. The Capital Market Law, passed the same year, provided an alternative channel for generating capital for new and existing projects, also partly relieving the government of its obligation to fund economic activity.

These domestic developments have been spurred on by recent international economic trends which have presented the Egyptian economy with a new set of conditions made binding by the country's membership in the World Trade Organisation and its signing of GATT. Under this agreement, Egypt is required to open its markets to free trade in goods and services, which include fiscal, banking, credit and accounting services, as well as tourism and transportation projects.

On the regional level, new footholds in the Middle East peace process have sparked economic initiatives which already are beginning to leave their mark on the Egyptian economy. Increased regional stability is bound to attract foreign investments. Moreover, the formation of a Middle East market will benefit the country and the region by bringing

together manpower and skills with technological changes.

Also on the regional level, Egypt, as one of 10 countries that signed the European Partnership Agreement, which will bilaterally do away with customs tariffs and liberalise trade in commodities, services and capital, stands to realise significant economic gains. The agreement is also expected to create a regional free trade area within 12-15 years.

In light of these regional and international economic developments, the role of the state will be re-defined so as to best address the needs of the market in all sectors of the economy. The state, therefore, will be responsible for making the transition to a free economy and for ensuring that domestic products are in compliance with international export standards. It will also act as the watch-dog to protect local industries from unfair trade and industrial practices. With this in mind, industrial production and research centres should cooperate in order to make the quality of domestic products one and the same with that decreed by international standards.

To help realise this goal, the government must also adapt the educational system and the curriculum in order to turn out graduates with skills demanded by employers.

Also on the state's plate is improving the trade bal-

ance and decreasing the budget deficit. This has already been achieved through the current economic reform programme. And, with Egypt having joined the WTO, the government should also help set guidelines for developing the agricultural sector as well as upgrading the quality of land and increasing research in new agricultural methods and technology.

To enable the other instruments of the economy to operate efficiently to support the free market system, the state should remove obstacles impeding capital market activities, private sector investment and production. This can be attained by encouraging investment through the establishment of feeding industries which can domestically produce the necessary industrial inputs, thereby decreasing the need for imports.

Banks must also be encouraged to upgrade their services so as to better face the challenge posed by the liberalised trade services.

These measures are imperative for the smooth transition to a free market economic system, and are at once made more pressing given the establishment of trade blocs and the relationship between economics and politics. And, although different from the state's former role, these new measures are by no means less significant.

MOE focuses on growth

THE MINISTER of Economy, Nawal El-Tatawi, stated early this week that the main focus of her ministry was to adopt policies which serve the government's aim of boosting the rate of growth, encouraging investment, creating 500,000 new job opportunities and raising the standard of living.

Tatawi, reviewing the achievements of the economic reform programme over the last few years, pointed to the monetary and fiscal reforms, the liberalisation of the currency exchange rate, the interest rate and the lifting of subsidies. She noted that these policies have contributed to the accumulation of about \$18 billion in the reserves of the Central Bank. The government, added Tatawi, has also been able to reduce the inflation rate by about 18 per cent, lowering it to about eight or nine per cent.

The government, she explained, will direct its efforts along two avenues. The first will be to develop and make use of public sector companies' untapped potential. The second will be to create an environment suitable for private sector growth.

Iraq pays up

LAST WEEK, the Ministry of Manpower and Recruitment began to hand out the first batch of long-awaited cheques to Egyptian Gulf War victims who, due to serious personal injury or death, qualified for compensation under Category B.

The funds were allocated by the United Nations Compensation Commission (UNCC), established by the UN after the war to sort out the various claims. In the recent past, a shortage of cash resulting from a deadlock between the UN and Iraq had held up payments. However, funds for Category B victims, who were granted priority by the commission, were made available by liquidating Iraqi frozen funds in foreign banks and selling off Iraqi oil and oil products which had been held by foreign countries since the Gulf War.

The first 60 victims and their beneficiaries, who were owed LE700,000, received their cheques last week, and the second group, comprising 95 Egyptians, will get compensation cheques totalling LE1.3 million after the Eid holiday. The UN has so far approved 440 Egyptian applications for compensation under Category B, said Abdel El-Asar, the ministry's consultant for international and technical cooperation. He added that the value of each Category B compensation ranges from between US\$1,250-\$2,500.

ABA-India memo

THE ALEXANDRIA Businessmen's Association (ABA) and the Indian Federation of Industries are scheduled to sign a memorandum of understanding on trade, industrial and technical cooperation in the fields of investment and technology. The signing is to take place in New Delhi next week.

According to Sherif Delawer, an ABA member and India's honorary consul in Alexandria, a high-level business delegation comprising public and private sector executives will represent the ABA in a one-week visit to India scheduled to begin 27 February. In addition to providing business opportunities on a company-to-company level, the delegation will visit Bangalore, India's high-tech city. They will also travel to Bombay, as well as meet with members of business organisations and government officials.

Dollar daze

THE US government, in an effort to stem a tide of currency counterfeiting, has announced that it will change the appearance of its currency over the course of one year, beginning by redesigning the \$100 bill. The Egyptian market has recently fallen victim to the proliferation of counterfeit \$100 notes.

However, US Ambassador in Cairo, Edward Walker last week said that the US treasury would continue to honour both old and new bills for as long as they are in circulation. The US Treasury will not recall the older notes, he added.

Walker said he hoped the transition to the new notes in the Egyptian markets would be a smooth one. "Our message to the public in Egypt is not to hurry to exchange your old bills," Walker said in a press release.

Edited by Ghada Ragab

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Market report

Don't cry for the GMI

FUELING the fears of analysts, the General Market Index continued its decline, inching down by 0.56 points to level off at 204.43 points for the week ending 15 February. The value of transactions, however, increased from LE86.16 million to LE86.72 million.

Unable to break free from its slump, the manufacturing sector again suffered a few blows, with its index sliding by 1.19 points to close at 264.29 points as a result of a decrease in the value of 13 manufacturing sector companies. Egypt Electric Cables Company (Kabel) absorbed the biggest loss, its shares closing LE7.04 lower than their opening price. Kabel's shares closed at LE88.02 per share. Other losers included the Extracted Oils Company whose shares lost LE3.99 to

close at LE37.01 and the Egypt Iron and Steel Company whose shares fell by 10.78 per cent to close at LE2.05.

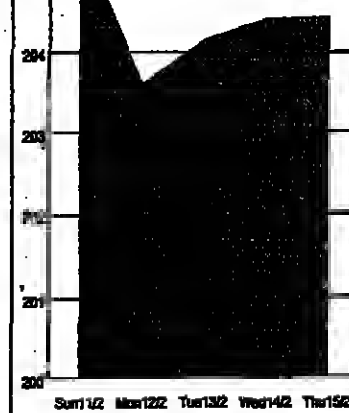
It was not all doom and gloom, however, for the sector. The Family Foods Company gained LE18.9 per share to close at LE140 while those of the

Paints and Chemical Industries Company levelled off at LE620 after opening at LE608.5 per share. Abu Keir Fertilisers' shares led the market in terms of both the value and volume of transactions. In heavy trading action, it cornered 52 per cent of total market transactions by trading 10.41 million shares valued at LE35.96 million.

Plans by the Egyptian-American Bank (EAB) to increase its capital by 20 per cent through the sale of shares had investors scrambling, and resulted in a 1.83 point increase for the sector's index which closed at 265.48.

For the second consecutive week, shares of the Commercial International Bank (CIB) increased in value. CIB's shares gained LE25 per share to close at LE483.

The service sector, however, had yet another bearish



week. The sector's index declined by 1.28 points to close at 137.47 as shares of Misr Hotels lost LE2 per share to close at LE54.5.

In all, the shares of 18 companies declined in value, 23 increased and 25 remained unchanged.

Mullahs lose their grip

Baseball caps and opposition newspapers are taking their place alongside Islamic scarves and revolutionary guards. **Pernille Bramming** writes from Tehran

So where has the Islamic revolution gone? For in Tehran on loudspeakers are roaring the call for prayer five times a day. As a matter of fact, there are astonishingly few mosques, nor does one see much of the revolutionary guards and police. The majority of the women seem to have left the chador at home.

Instead, they are wearing small headscarves loosely knotted under the chin. The young women, especially, appear to be participating in a competition over who can reveal the most from underneath their scarves. Ten centimetres was the record. I found during a two-week stay in the Islamic Republic.

In the mountains north of Tehran, a favourite weekend spot for all age groups, some of the young couples hold hands. The guys wear James Dean jackets and tight jeans and many sport baseball caps. The girls wear make-up and let their metre-long hair hang freely down their backs, their scarves only covering their necks.

"Sometimes the revolutionary guards make a raid and arrest people. We are not allowed to wear caps and girls should not wear make-up; it's un-Islamic. Couples should not hold hands either. It's very difficult to be young in Iran," says one of my two young companions.

Young people make up more than half of the population (44.3 per cent are less than 15 years old). They listen to Western compact discs and watch videos from the West. They organise parties and some of them drink vodka — not from bottles, but from 25-litre jugs that you order by telephone if you don't produce alcohol yourself.

And yet, practically all attend school and have profited from the primary health care system which the Islamic government has extended to cover every one of the more than 60,000 small villages in Iran. It is impressive progress which, ironically, might also contribute to the opposition against the regime.

When you take a look at the 300 or more different newspapers and periodicals, the future role of the mullahs in politics is the main subject of debate. For never in the history of Iranian Shi'ism has the prestige

of the mullahs been as low as now, after 17 years of Islamic government. Today, it is clear that the mullahs are not able to deliver the goods people want: economic progress and a minimum of international respectability.

If the government does not solve these problems, the traditional relationship between the mullahs and the masses will change dramatically. The mullahs are at risk of losing their support if they have not done so already, says Ibrahim Yazdi, who is the leader of the most broadly based of the opposition groups in Iran, The Iranian Liberation Movement.

As one of the closest advisers to Khomeini during his last years of exile in Paris, Ibrahim Yazdi was given the post of foreign minister after the revolution. He resigned only 10 months later, protesting against the seizure of the American Embassy. Ibrahim Yazdi was recently allowed to run in the parliamentary elections in March.

While the Iranian Liberation Movement is overtly against the constitution and the principles of theocracy, a number of political factions within the present parliament limit their criticism, calling for "Islamic technocrats" to replace the mullahs.

"If you are sick, you want the best doctor regardless of his religious beliefs," former Hezbollah (supporters of the Party of God) write in their magazine *Asr Ma*, thus dropping their former conviction that ideological correctness is more important than professional skills. It was this conviction that resulted in a massive brain drain from the public sector of Iran during the first years after the revolution, when Hezbollah was the dominating political faction in the Iranian parliament.

And the Iranian economy is sick. Since the revolution in 1979 the population has doubled to the present 64 million, oil revenues have dropped by 50 per cent and an estimated 600 billion dollars were consumed by the flames of the eight-year war against Iraq. You need more than one clever physician to cure such a patient.

So the Iranians are complaining. The foreign debt has reached a threatening level,



Palestinian women shop in the Old City of Jerusalem in preparation for the feast of *Eid Al-Fitr*, marking the end of the holy fasting month of Ramadan (photo: AFP)

inflation is more than 50 per cent, 4 million are unemployed and 6 million underemployed. The value of the rial is spinning downwards and salaries cannot keep up with ever increasing prices. The average income has thus been reduced by 50 per cent since the revolution, according to official figures. It is only when you consider the black economy, estimated to represent at least 25 per cent of the official GNP, that you can understand how the Iranians are making ends meet.

Meanwhile, the Iranian press has recently been enjoying a level of freedom without precedent since the short democratic experience in the forties. In the intellectual monthly magazine *Kijian* one can find a

five-page-long article on secularism, written by one of the founders of the Islamic Revolution, Abdul-Karim Sourush. He is said to be the most popular mullah among students of theological faculties. He writes bluntly about the necessity of an independent priesthood: political power should be in the hands of politicians and the priests should be the watchdogs of the people, guarding against the abuse of power by the state.

Even at the very top, President Rafsanjani and Ayatollah Khamenei have made statements about the future role of the mullahs in politics. They have led some political analysts to conclude that the Iranian leadership is moving towards a radical po-

litical shift that ultimately will result in a takeover by Islamic technocrats and reduce the role of the mullahs to that of delivering the ideological goods.

The forming of the new faction, The Independent Party, within parliament is also seen as a development which could be crucial. The leader of the faction, the university professor, Ghassem Sholeh Saadi, said in an interview quoted by *Iran Focus*: "The independent faction is interested in observing human rights, personal and social freedoms such as the freedom of expression, press freedom etc. We are interested in freedom for political parties and our main criticism right now is that there are no independent political parties in Iran."

Last month the independents took the unprecedented step of writing an open letter to the minister of interior asking him to secure free and fair elections. The letter was signed by several ministers.

Meanwhile, there are also strong groups pulling in the opposite direction of democratisation and the loosening up of the theocracy such as the traditional right-wing headed by parliament speaker, Naeq Nouri, who has a majority in the present parliament. Their slogan is "The mullahs should not be excluded from politics." The Hezbollah has also intensified their violent activities during the last year against what they call "anti-Islamic" trends in society.

Treading water with Turkey

Only something as vital as water could bring two such long-term foes together. But the technical talks held in Damascus recently between the irrigation ministries of Syria and Iraq were concluded without agreeing on the practical steps needed to respond to Turkey's water policy in the Euphrates.

The Damascus discussions hoped to induce Turkey into signing a final agreement with Syria and Iraq that will ensure a fair share of the distribution of water from the Euphrates. Currently, Turkey is a signatory to a transitional bilateral agreement signed with Syria in 1987. This agreement requires Turkey to release 500 cubic metres of water per second from the Euphrates into Syria. Syria's share is 42 per cent. It pumps the remaining 58 per cent into Iraqi territory according to a 1990 Iraqi-Syrian agreement, concluded under the auspices of the Arab League.

The 1987 Turkish-Syrian agreement remained viable until the Ataturk Dam reached a full water reserve. Now that this has been achieved, Turkey has announced that it intends to construct another dam on the Euphrates, known as Birecik. Syria and Iraq believe that the new dam will pose a serious threat to both countries as it necessitates the construction of a new lake 30 kilometres away from the Turkish-Syrian borders which may diminish the supply of water flowing into Syria and Iraq.

In spite of requests from Syria and Iraq, Turkey rejected convening the seventeenth tripartite committee meeting to look into the reorganisation of the distribution of water from the Euphrates. Nevertheless, a clearer picture of Turkey's water policy is now emerging, based on three main characteristics.

First, Turkey is capitalising on the differences between Syria and Iraq, as evident from statements made by Turkish officials. While Ankara maintains that the dams and other schemes which have emerged from under the umbrella of the South Eastern Anatolia Project (GAP) will have no effect on the water supply, it also insists that any decrease in the water supply reaching Iraq via Syria is an issue that must be settled between Syria and Iraq, without Turkey's involvement.

With Turkey ready to play the water card, Syria and Iraq are treading carefully, writes **Khaled El-Sergani**

The second characteristic of Turkish water policy is based on dissociating GAP from the problems of water allocation. Turkey does not see any contradiction between ensuring the supply of water to Syria and Iraq, and exercising its sovereign rights over the Tigris and Euphrates rivers. Hence, Turkey does not conceive of a problem between the three countries over the Ataturk Dam and the GAP projects. Moreover, argues Turkey, there is no dispute over water rights between the three countries since no agreement on water distribution has been signed.

The third factor governing Turkey's water policy is its determination to intensify technical cooperation between the three countries to fully exploit the waters of the Euphrates and Tigris. This includes joint projects and modernising irrigation facilities. However, these same issues were expected to be the focus of discussions in the tripartite negotiations that never took off.

Discussions over water rights between Turkey, Syria and Iraq contain more than technical issues. They include a political dimension that must not be overlooked. Ankara accuses Syria of supporting the rebel Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) which has been fighting to set up a separate state for Turkey's Kurdish minority. If these accusations are true then it is likely that Turkey will put pressure on Syria before the conclusion of an agreement on a fairer distribution of water supply.

Similarly, the water dispute is linked to Turkey's endeavours to consolidate its regional role following Israel's peace accords with neighbouring Arab states. Turkey is playing the "water" card to capitalise on political and economic gains in the proposed Middle East order.

Syria and Iraq maintain that the latest water talks are technical and not political. They have taken this stand, in part, so as not to antagonise Turkey. This approach

also serves to ward off accusations that Syria is edging closer to Iraq as this may affect ongoing negotiations between the two Arab states and other regional and world powers.

However, the technical approach to the talks have ended with moral rather than procedural obligations. Iraq and Syria did not discuss at length issues related to the Tigris waters, neither did they discuss Turkey's role in this issue. They only managed to agree to refer the matter to the Arab League in its meeting scheduled for 13 March.

The statement issued after the Damascus talks was characterised by rhetorical phrases such as a pledge to coordinate Syria's and Iraq's positions in the face of Turkish measures concerning the Tigris and the demand that Ankara recognises the need to implement a fair distribution of the water between the three states.

Moreover, Iraq and Syria failed to state the quotas they require in the Damascus talks, preferring to postpone it for the tripartite negotiations. Previously, however, they had demanded more than 666 square metres per second, based on a one-third share for each country of the average water flow of 1,000 cubic metres per second.

During the Damascus talks, the Syrians rejected the Iraqi proposal to open up the borders between both states. This would have been administered by a joint working group of experts. Instead, the only pseudo-procedural outcome of the recent Damascus talks were threats to boycott European companies assisting Turkey in the construction of the proposed Birecik Dam.

It is obvious that the main objective of the talks was not to persuade Turkey to accept the principle of fair distribution of water supply, but to involve the Arab League in the water dispute between the two Arab states and Turkey. Previously the Arab League had avoided intervention due to lack of coordination on the part of Syria and Iraq. However, an Arab League resolution on this matter would establish a collective Arab position instead of a unilateral one that could provoke Turkey. Syria and Iraq seem determined to avert hostilities with Turkey which may lead to Turkey's rejection of future negotiations over water rights.

Unwilling partners

Will the right-Islamist coalition put an end to months of political and economic uncertainty in Turkey, asks **Samia Nkrumah**

After protracted negotiations the Islamic Refah and right-wing Motherland (ANAP) parties agreed on Monday to form a coalition government in Turkey. The tortuous track towards the formation of a government has highlighted two main struggles: the long-standing secular-Islamic rivalry and the challenges of greater democratisation.

The only conclusive outcome of Turkey's inconclusive December elections is that no political party won a clear majority to form a government on its own. Ensuing developments also revealed the extent to which opposing political forces will go to impede the Islamists' rise to power in Turkey.

President Suleyman Demirel should have entrusted Refah leader, Necmettin Erbakan, with the job of forming the first Islamic majority government in Turkey. But secularist resistance prevailed over conventionality. And an Islamic majority government in Turkey will not see the light yet. In doing so, secular forces sent a clear signal that the time has not come for them to throw in the towel.

Until very recently, no other party wanted to form an alliance with Refah, which won the greatest number of votes and parliamentary seats with approximately 6 million votes and 158 seats in the 550-member parliament.

Ironically, the latest elections highlighted the fragility of Turkish democratic traditions. Former prime minister, Tansu Ciller's declaration last year that Turkey will soon match the standards of democracy enjoyed by European countries seems a far cry from reality. It was ANAP's leader, Mesut Yilmaz, who was asked on 3 February to form a government following his party's failure to reach an agreement with Ciller's centre-right True Path Party. ANAP took the third highest number of seats in parliament but the second highest number of votes, 500,000 less than Refah.

Out of necessity or personal ambitions, the old foes turned friends. According to The Associated Press, Refah and ANAP have agreed in principle to form a coalition government, reneging on the position adopted during the elections campaign. Yilmaz retreated from his earlier statements and declared that his party was never opposed to doing a deal with Refah. And Refah's Erbakan declared that his party would share power with any other party. Erbakan admitted that it was time to make compromises.

The first compromise appears to be an acceptance that Yilmaz will hold the rotating premiership for the first term. Second, Refah looks set to relinquish key ministries like foreign and defense to ANAP.

It is also expected that ANAP will dominate the economic agenda in an ANAP-Refah government. This would render Refah's radical economic programme of the campaigning days sheer rhetoric. In its campaign, Refah promised to renegotiate the customs deal with the European Union (EU) that would harmonise tariffs rates between Turkey and other EU countries. Erbakan said that this would be detrimental to Turkish interests. It also pledged to scrap the use of interest rates.

Ciller, on the other hand, campaigned hard for the EU to agree to the customs union accord in order to fend off the Islamist resurgence in Turkey. But it is not up to the new government alone to decide. Even though the European parliament has already agreed to Turkey's customs union with EU, the agreement is yet to be ratified by individual EU governments and it is unlikely to come into force before 1997.

The new government is also likely to adopt a softer line against the West than that envisioned by Refah, especially as it will also have to negotiate with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) which has the power to approve the release of a \$908.9 million standby facility.

These decisions will have to be taken in a country which suffered record inflation of 126 per cent last year and a severe balance of payments crisis. The economy slumped by 6 per cent and economic growth tumbled to 7 per cent in the same year.

An ANAP-Refah government may also have to accommodate different foreign policy priorities, particularly in Turkey's relations with neighbouring Arab countries like Iraq and Syria. Erbakan indicated that improving relations with the Islamic world is at the top of his foreign policy agenda, the ultimate aim being the creation of an Islamic confederation of states.

Erbakan also argued that Turkey is losing millions of dollars due to the sanctions enforced against Iraq. The UN allows Iraq's neighbours to sidestep full implementation of sanctions to avoid heavy losses to their economies. Turkey is yet to make use of this opportunity, according to statements by Erbakan. He also promised to improve relations with Syria and settle the water dispute between both states in a cordial manner. The Islamist leader even hinted that Turkey's borders with Syria and Iraq could eventually be abolished.

At the same time, ANAP is not holding on to the ministry of interior. A perfect scenario would be for Yilmaz to leave Erbakan to tackle complex issues like social order, human rights and national unity, while right-wingers hold the helm in economic and foreign relations. It might even prove easier to contain Islamists within a government than to deal with them as a political opposition.

The big question is how long will the coalition last? After all, it was the collapse of the right-left coalition that necessitated early elections last year. The new coalition may accentuate the struggle between the right-wing secularists and the Islamists. This time round it is the government that will provide the setting for the conflict. With an eye on the West and another on the East, Turkey's new government will have to trace itself for a precarious fusion of conflicting interests.

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Bill of damages

Palestinian Intifada victims will find Israeli courts closed to them if a new bill is passed in the Knesset, reports **Martiz Tadros**

In Nablus, in 1994 a group of masked Palestinian youths caught writing graffiti on the walls, were attacked and hooded by Israeli soldiers. The soldiers shot two young Palestinian girls, passing by at the time. Severely wounded, one of them with head injuries, they were rushed to hospital. Today, their parents are seeking compensation from the Israeli authorities for the permanent damage done to their daughters.

But the military has refused to take responsibility for the actions of its soldiers. They argue that there is no proof that the injuries were caused by bullets fired by the Israeli soldiers. This is in spite of the fact that two soldiers have confessed to the shooting. So far, the parents' compensation claim in the Israeli courts has been unsuccessful.

"This is not an unusual case," explained Dalia Kerstein from the Hamoked Centre for Defence of Human Rights, which fights for compensation for Palestinian victims of Israeli human rights violations. "I get plenty of similar cases each day where, despite plenty of physical evidence and witnesses to the event, Palestinians continue to find it hard to win compensation in Israeli courts." She insisted that 75 per cent of the cases she encounters are justifiable compensation claims. "They are victims of unprovoked attacks such as that which happened to the two girls."

The chances of getting compensation may be reduced further if a new law, proposed by Israeli Justice Minister David Libai in December, is passed. If it gets through the Knesset, those physically damaged as a result of unprovoked attacks could no longer

claim compensation from Israeli courts. An undisclosed lump sum would be allocated to a special administrative committee, staffed by Palestinians, which would be held responsible for distributing the money as it saw fit.

Kerstein believes that the impetus behind the transfer of these claims to a separate Palestinian-run committee is the desire "for the Israeli government to wash its hands of its own crimes." She suspects that the special committee will be allocated a much smaller amount than what the Palestinians would have got through the Israeli courts. "Besides, the legal obligation to pay victims will be lost since you will be dealing with an independent committee that is answerable to no one, which is different from a court that is acting on behalf of the government that acknowledges its responsibility."

The criteria for making claims is a cause of concern for Jessica Montell, development director of the Israeli human rights centre B'Tselem. "We are concerned about equitable standards for the Palestinians. The criteria will be much more stringent than it is now. The new law does not seem flexible enough to allow for individuals who do not have sufficient evidence to prove their cases, but who have suffered unjustly all the same."

Judicial decisions, she feels, have always been coloured by political considerations, but it could get worse. "Palestinians are at a certain disadvantage in Israeli courts. The judges are not very sympathetic to the cases presented. They see the Intifada as having been a national enemy and, hence, the complaints as illegal

so the victims aren't always treated fairly and justly. But the new law will even infringe on whatever rights they have now to compensation. Besides, what will happen to the victims whose cases have been in court for the last 2 or 3 years? They will lose everything once the new law is passed."

Comparisons between Palestinian compensation claims and Israeli reparations for Holocaust victims have brought forth a furious response from Israeli officials. Yet John MacFarlane from the Beit Zeit University Law Centre asserted that "on one level, the comparison is justified since the Palestinians' right to reparations is as legitimate as the Israeli government's reparations demands on Germany. The Holocaust should not be seen as the only evil committed in the history of humanity. They should not use it as an excuse not to pay up. However, for the Israeli government to pay full compensation for the actions of its security forces would be an acknowledgment of its guilt, and this it does not want to do."

MacFarlane believes that the bill will be passed. "Although there are some Israelis opposed to it, the majority of Israelis do not believe that any injustice was committed in the Intifada and, therefore, they should not be held responsible for reparations." He emphasised that Israel's attitude on this sheds light on the prospects of compensation for refugees in the next round of PLO-Israeli negotiations in May: "If the victims of human rights abuses in the Intifada, which happened a few years ago, are not able to reclaim their rights from the Israeli government, then what chances do the refugees of 1948 and 1967 have?"



Vote fiasco in Bangladesh

Last week's Bangladeshi election was marred by strikes, urban warfare and a boycott by the main opposition parties, writes **Sophia Christoforakis**

"Anybody who goes to vote will come back dead," said a speaker at a protest rally a few hours before last week's general election in Bangladesh. The capital, Dhaka, was a scene of urban warfare last week, with bombings, strikes and arson attacks crippling the city. Opposition parties refusing to participate in the election — called by the ruling Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) — instigated a 48-hour strike prior to the 15 February ballot. Commerce was paralysed, ports were closed, river ferries were anchored and rail traffic came to a standstill. The army erected sandbagged bunkers at all the major junctions in the city and patrolled the city on gun-mounted vehicles. Despite the heavy army presence, 20 people were killed prior to the poll and another 16 were killed and 500 wounded during it.

The election was a political fiasco. Some candidates withdrew after being stripped naked in public. Civil servants did not show up to monitor the polling booths, and radio and television presenters refused to announce the results. Only 10 per cent of the 55 million eligible voters voted, a far cry from the 55 per cent that voted in the 1991 election. The BNP won 205 of the 300 seats.

The election commission ordered a partial run-off vote in 84 constituencies and suspended results in nine others. Irregularities pertaining to ballot box stuffing and election rigging are being investigated. Opposition leaders claim that the voting was heavily rigged to ensure the BNP's victory.

Election campaigns are a rarity in this South Asian country of 120 million inhabitants. Since Pakistan's recognition of Bangladesh in 1974, coups and military dictatorships have riddled the country.

In 1991, current Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia and the current leader of the opposition, Sheikh Hasina Wajed, ousted a military-backed regime that had held power for eight years. Today the two women are arch-rivals and are primarily responsible for the chaotic state of the Bangladeshi nation. Zia is the widow of assassinated President Ziaur Rahman and leads the ruling BNP.

Wajed is the leader of the opposition Awami League, previously led by her father Mujibur Rahman. Bangladesh, a Bangladeshi independence hero. Some analysts have argued that there is little difference in the two women's political stances and objectives — they are both nationalist in orientation — and see little reason for the current conflict that has been termed the "war of the women". The current crisis started 22 months ago, when the main opposition parties walked out of parliament, offended at a jab from one of Zia's ministers. Since then opposition groups have directed their political activity to extra-parliamentary arenas, such as street protests. Government negotiations with the opposition groups were held under the aegis of Western diplomats but broke down last 16 December, leading to the latest dissolution of the Bangladeshi parliament.

Zia was constitutionally obliged to hold an election within 90 days of the dissolution of parliament. The three main opposition parties boycotted the poll. They claimed that Zia's party could not be trusted to conduct the election fairly and called for a neutral supervisor. Wajed claimed that Zia's administration was repressive and corrupt, denying basic human rights during its rule. Furthermore, the BNP was accused of stealing votes in past by-elections. Zia dismissed calls

for a neutral supervisor, claiming that the opposition was trying to provoke another military coup.

Zia did not campaign during the election. "I just don't feel good about it," she said. "How can I? There's no opposition." The truth of the matter is that she probably would not have been able to campaign. A pre-election trip into two constituencies she was contesting north of Dhaka left a trail of devastation as protesters rioted in an attempt to stop the meetings.

Nevertheless, Zia is the only prime minister to complete a four-year term in Bangladesh's short but turbulent history. During her term of office she has raised the female literacy rate from 10 per cent to 35 per cent through scholarships and other forms of support.

Bangladesh remains one of the world's poorest countries; 40 per cent of its people live under the poverty line and 70 per cent are illiterate. The economy is currently growing at five per cent a year, fuelled by the rapidly expanding garment industry that supplies cheap clothing outlets in Europe and America. Foreign governments have watched the vote keenly, regarding it as a test of Bangladesh's young democracy. Foreign businessmen are waiting to see whether investing in this country of cheap labour is worthwhile, given the unstable political scene.

The election process has revealed a shaky political system, rather than support for any party. Moreover, the political unrest is likely to continue at a similar degree of intensity as that of the last couple of weeks, especially since the opposition has called for a three-day non-cooperation movement from 24 February.

A campaign has begun to stop arms exports to governments with poor human rights records. But, warns **Faiza Raza**, the US will be unwilling to lose the billions of dollars it earns from indiscriminate weapon sales

War's lifeline runs on

Backed by a coalition of about 1,000 non-governmental organisations as well as luminaries of the stature of Nobel prize-winners Archbishop Walter Mahabula of the Central African Republic and Desmond Tutu of South Africa, international arms control campaigners are demanding tighter export restrictions on governments that sell billions of dollars worth of weapons to countries with poor human rights records. On 13 February in 10 cities around the world, peace activists and retired politicians like New Zealand's former prime minister, David Lange, former Irish prime minister, Garret Fitzgerald, former French prime minister, Michel Rocard, and former US defence secretary, Robert McNamara, joined in launching an international campaign to establish a code of conduct that would prevent arms exports to dictators and nations with proven human rights violations.

"If the United States and the European Union both fixed these sorts of codes in law, 80 per cent of the world's arms trade would be placed under tougher controls," said Brianwyne Brady, assistant director of the British American Security Information Council, one among the numerous think tanks promoting the campaign.

In the US, bipartisan legislation to enforce a code of conduct won 157 votes in the House of Representatives last year — falling 50 votes short of the required majority. The Senate is scheduled to vote on the bill later this year. After the Gulf War in 1991, the European Union agreed on eight criteria limiting the export of weapons, but they are non-binding and sufficiently vague to allow for

varying interpretations by any of the 15 member-nations. For instance, Sweden, Italy and Portugal enforce arms embargoes against Indonesia because of its appalling human rights record, but Britain remains an important jet, aircraft and tank supplier there. France, another key weapon supplier to southern dictatorships like the infamous administration of late Rwandan President Juvénal Habyarimana, also strongly objects to legislating against highly profitable exports.

In his opening address to the activists, former Costa Rican president and Nobel Peace Prize winner, Oscar Arias Sanchez, urged fellow Nobel Prize holders to join him in drafting a code of conduct that would be submitted to the UN General Assembly next September. Since the end of the Cold War, Arias said, arms merchants have aggressively sought new clients in developing nations and helped fuel 50 wars that are now raging worldwide. In America, he explained, government subsidies pay for about 50 per cent of all weapon exports. And since 1991, the US has reaped an average annual profit of almost \$15 billion from exports to Third World countries — 85 per cent of which go to countries with institutionalised human rights violations. "Until we regulate the weapons trade, arms dealers, just like drug traffickers and the slave traders, will continue to reap benefits at the cost of human lives in all countries in the world," Arias concluded.

With the end of the Cold War, the US arms industry took a new turn. While production was formerly directed to the Pentagon market in competition with the USSR, the dwindling arms race

considerably reduced domestic demand. Defence budget credits — estimated at \$360 billion in 1989 — reached a low of \$270 in '95. Some multinational giants like Ford, IBM and General Electric had to sell their weapon factories, and large companies like Martin Marietta and Lockheed were forced to merge. As a result, President Clinton subsidised the industry by granting companies greater tax deductions and loopholes "to maintain the arms manufacturing base". The policy of intervening in favour of the industry was actually established during the Bush administration, when the State Department directed US embassies to actively support weapon sales. Moreover, then President George Bush directly intervened in the sale of the M1A2 tanks to Kuwait in 1992 and Commerce Secretary Ronald Brown participated in the sale negotiations of the F/A-18 fighters to Indonesia.

The Clinton administration further facilitated arms sales by lifting most embargoes prohibiting sales to former "enemies" and/or states sanctioned for their human rights record. Hence in '93, nations from the former East European communist bloc — such as Poland, Hungary and Slovakia — became trade partners. And in '94, the US also lifted the embargo against China — a country with forced labour camps and scores of jailed dissidents.

The decrease in Pentagon spending caused the industry to redirect its output to supply the international market — exporting arms to the highest bidder, regardless of the human toll. While US politicians warned against the threat of chemical and biological weapon proliferation, subsidised multi-

nationalists converted their production from nuclear to conventional weapons.

Bill Clinton, who eloquently denounced the arms race, referring to the need to curtail the industry in his first speech to the UN, carefully omitted any references to the proliferation of high-tech conventional weapons. Along the same lines, the administration used its brand of newspeak to camouflage military assistance: "aid for security" became "aid to promote peace and democracy" and aid to Israel and Egypt — representing 87 per cent of the foreign military budget — was translated as "aid for peace in the Middle East". Under this guise, Israel received 20 F-15 fighter planes and close to 100 F-16s — which are used to bomb South Lebanon.

Since the early '90s the US weapon industry has successfully shifted to export production and is currently on its way to monopolising the international market. In 1991 American arms sales constituted 49 per cent of global sales to the South. By '93 the US share of this market had reached almost 75 per cent. Political scientist Ethan Kapstein believes that such figures do not merely reflect multinational profits and economic deregulation, but political hegemony in a new world order where the US remains the lone superpower. This entails that America should pursue monopoly capitalism, writes Kapstein, so as to manipulate world politics and control allies and "friendly" countries as well as "dissident" nations. If Kapstein's hardly original views represent the dominant "free market" ideology, the campaigners for arms export limitations will not stand much of a chance.

Secrets behind success story

Some 80 policy-makers, academics and senior economists from various regions will meet in the Malaysian capital, Kuala Lumpur, from 29 February to 1 March for a conference on East Asian Development: Lessons for a New Global Environment. The findings of the conference will be transmitted to the ninth meeting of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), which will focus on the theme of globalisation and liberalisation.

The UNCTAD report to the conference, published in Geneva this week, points out that the economic success of East Asia is not purely market-driven, but is also attributable to a well-defined role of the state. Detailed studies, it says, have shown that the East Asian newly industrialising economies — headed by Japan but also including South Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong and Singapore — are using selective industrial policies to channel resources from old industries into new ones, thus altering the economies' long-term industrial development. According to the report, the East Asian nations are also applying policies that support an im-

A conference in Kuala Lumpur next week will investigate the secrets behind the East Asian economic miracle, reports **Gamil Ibrahim** from Geneva

pressive pace of capital accumulation in the region, without which the rapid pace of technological upgrading, product diversification and increasing international competitiveness would not have been possible. These policies are accompanied by the establishment of institutional links to facilitate cooperation between the government and the private sector.

During the last two decades, the economic performance of the newly industrialising East Asian economies has attracted an enormous amount of attention. More recently, strong growth in a second-tier of South East Asian industrialising countries — including Indonesia, Malaysia and Thailand — has been notable.

Economic development in the region has been associated with a fast pace of industrialisation and steeply rising trends of output and living standards. Moreover, the experience has begun

to have a profound impact on economic policy debates outside the region.

Initially, the East Asian experience was seen by Western observers as a case of market-oriented, export-led industrialisation. From this perspective, it was argued that the first wave of successful industrialisation was the product of the rapid dismantling of government restrictions in the immediate post-war period, allowing the private sector to operate under world market prices.

East Asian development approximated what could be expected from a *laissez-faire* system, in which a higher rate of growth is achieved through improved allocation of resources. Gains are made from international trade due to comparative advantages and greater competition.

The report emphasises that some cracks started to appear in this viewpoint in the 1980s. As a

result, the simple free-market interpretation of the East Asian experience no longer enjoys wide support and there is a growing consensus on the positive contribution of the state to the region's success.

The East Asian developmental experience offers some very interesting lessons on how poor economies, dependent on natural resources, can make an effective transition to labour-intensive manufacturing and then to more complex manufacturing industries, essential for the attainment of high standards of living.

However, elements in understanding the East Asian miracle are still missing, in particular regarding the institutional framework and the role of savings and investment. The objective of the Kuala Lumpur conference is to shed more light on those elements.

It is clear that there is no single path to development which fits every country, or even the majority of countries. However, recognising this institutional diversity should not be confused with the argument that there are no lessons to be learnt from the East Asian experience.

India's smoldering volcanoes

Religion, caste and corruption scandals are the most contentious issues in the forthcoming Indian elections. But the ruling Congress Party's grip on power does not seem to be slipping, writes **Gamil Nikruman** from Delhi

On 13 February, Indian Prime Minister Narasimha Rao ignited the first electrifying sparks of his electoral campaign when he declared in a nationwide address that only candidates with a "clean image" would contest the forthcoming elections, scheduled for March or April. Rao summoned his Congress Party's leading politicians and stressed that the ruling party's list of candidates for the lower house of parliament (Lok Sabha) elections would not include those whose image has been tainted with corruption.

Premier Rao also stressed that the Congress Party must focus its energies on the social and economic uplift of the "60 crore" — 600 million — Indians who constitute the bottom of the country's social and economic pyramid. He also warned against the communalisation of the Indian polity.

The growth of Hindu communalism, in particular, is an unsettling development in Indian politics. On 13 February, the Hindu chauvinist, Sadhvi Ritambhara, leader of Vishwa Hindu Parishad, was acquitted by a Delhi court. The notorious Ms Ritambhara, who is widely regarded among Hindu chauvinist circles as a religious leader, was charged with making inflammatory remarks and whipping up religious hysteria and communal hatred. Ms Ritambhara wants India's Hindus to do battle with their Muslim compatriots over the construction of a Hindu temple in the northern Indian city of Ayodhya. She also warned against the shedding of Hindu blood in the war-torn province of Kashmir. Ritambhara is against the "appeasement of India's Muslim minority".

But India's communal strife is multi-faceted. Ms Ritambhara and her supporters are often dismissed by lower-caste Hindus as high-caste bigots. Her organisation is regarded as an elitist outfit. The lower-caste Hindus see the fight against Ritambhara and her ilk as a fight against upper-caste Brahminism. They detest the chauvinism of the upper echelons of Hindu fanatics.

Last year, the northern state of Uttar Pradesh — India's most populous and impoverished — saw the election of the first woman from the lowest, "untouchable" caste to the highest post of the land, that of chief minister of the state. The collapse of the consensus of the late Jawaharlal Nehru, India's first prime minister, which welded together the country's different religious communities and linguistic and socio-economic groups has emerged as a key issue in the electoral campaign.

At present, the Bharatiya Janata Party, India's largest opposition political group, has 118 seats in the lower house of parliament. By comparison, the ruling Congress Party has 277 seats, the socialist-oriented Janata Dal has 39 seats and the Communist Party, 36. India's 130-million strong Muslim community stands mainly behind Rao's Congress Party, even though they have serious misgivings about the government's inability to prevent the destruction of the Ayodhya Mosque in December 1992. Ritambhara and her supporters claim that the site of the mosque is the birthplace of the Hindu deity Ram.

Finally, Premier Rao wants the official investigating agencies to have a "free hand" in their fight against corruption in high places. The recent scandals that have rocked the country have left many ministers and parliamentarians tarnished with the pungent smell of corruption. The electorate will not take kindly to any cover-up attempts.

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IFOR an eye?

In a recent interview, Radovan Karadzic, the Bosnian Serb president proudly asserted that "We did not commit a single crime... We had prisoners of war, but we didn't kill them."

The sites of the mass graves unearthed by UN officials, the product of five years of ethnic genocide, however, place Karadzic's quips in a different light. The international war crimes tribunal in The Hague, also begging to differ, has indicted him, along with his henchman, Serb general Radko Mladic. Mladic, known as the "Butcher of Bosnia", is not quite as nonchalant. He has conferred with a high-powered Greek lawyer, and is planning his defence strategy should he find himself arrested and extradited, as did two Serb officers last week.

But if Karadzic has his way, Mladic has little to worry about. Following the arrest of the two officers, the Serbs broke off contact with the NATO-led Implementation Force (IFOR). And both Mladic and Karadzic, while hestantly arguing that the arrests go against the spirit of the Dayton Accord, reportedly breezed through NATO checkpoints. But is this, given that IFOR has orders for their arrest, also not in conflict with the spirit of the Dayton Accord, or more significantly, with justice?

The Serbs, though signatories to the peace accords, seem intent on proving that the agreement is not worth the ink with which it was signed. And, although the outcome of the Rome summit was a re-affirmation of the commitment to peace, after the summit, Zdravko Tolimir, the Serb general assigned to meet with NATO commanders, was a no-show, missing the plane and seemingly making a mockery of Serb President Milosevic's statements in Rome. He finally agreed to meet in Pale with General Walker, the IFOR commander, making it clear that the Serbs will not be pushed to peace, and that his orders come from Karadzic and Mladic, not Milosevic. In the meantime, IFOR commanders voiced their reluctance to pursue these and other war criminals, thereby also detracting from the spirit of peace and refuting the old adage that crime does not pay. For Karadzic and his cohorts, a precarious and ambiguous peace has given them their biggest payday to date — their freedom.

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Al-Ahram Weekly



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Shelter in the law

Ibrahim Nafie examines the rationale behind, and the likely effects of, the new housing legislation



People have every right to feel confused and anxious over the new housing law. Nor is it surprising that they should feel so, given that it is a long established tradition to eye any law that regulates the relationship between landlord and tenant with suspicion. It does not matter whether the properties in question are agricultural or residential. The question asked is invariably the same. Does this law favour the minority — ie the landlords, or the vast majority, ie the tenants?

There is certainly a tendency to view any new legislation with a pessimism that verges on paranoia. But then this paranoia has not developed in a vacuum. We have far too many vivid memories of laws that were promulgated without sufficient study as to their effect on the public. Faced with unworkable and destructive legislation, the public have tended to take matters into their own hands, exploiting whatever loopholes could be found and generally substituting codes of behaviour at once more acceptable, and rational than those enshrined in the statute books. At the same time we must also recognise an almost pathological lack of confidence in our public servants on the part of the public they are meant to serve. The expectation that there will be a discrepancy between official statements and real intentions has become the norm.

I was not surprised, then, by reactions to the new housing law, despite the fact that it possesses an exemplary clarity of purpose contained in an explicit and unambiguous text.

The new housing law clearly defines the obligations of contracting parties. It does not overwhelm its readers with endless waves of tortured legalese. Its articles are short and explicit. It assumes that the potential lessor and lessee are legally competent individuals capable of concluding a contract containing all the points on which it is necessary for them to agree.

Furthermore, it is very clear as to which premises fall under its mandate. These include premises never before leased, regardless of whether they exist at the time the law is put into effect or are constructed after that date. They include, too, premises governed by leases that terminated before the law came into effect as well as premises the lease of which terminated, by consent of the contracting parties or by virtue of litigation or other legal reasons, after the law has come into effect.

Landlords contemplating renting out new premises or constructing apartment blocks with the intent of leasing out the premises share a common anxiety. Once the contractual term ends, will they be able to resume physical possession of their property without recourse to lengthy and costly litigation?

This law will no longer apply to premises subject to the new housing law. Once the lease expires, the tenant would be considered to unlawful possession and the landlord would have the right to seek an immediate court order to evict the tenant and to take possession of the premises.

The same applies in the event of non-payment of rent, which under older legislation had become a grey area fraught with problems. In the past tenants would be charged to pay any outstanding rent before the landlord could file a claim. In those instances when the court ruled for the eviction of a tenant, the tenant could stay the execution of the eviction order by paying the outstanding rent as soon as he received notice. And that notice had to be delivered to the tenant personally.

contract in lieu of seeking a court order.

Landlords operating under the new law, therefore, will have no need to fear lengthy legal proceedings in order to evict tenants whose terms of lease have expired or who fail to pay the rent.

Why all this attention to landlords' rights?

The answer is simple. For more than four decades the housing market has been governed by a set of laws that have patently failed in allowing for the provision of adequate housing across all sectors of Egyptian society. The situation had reached breaking point, and the government was morally obliged to tackle it head-on, dismantling a landlord-tenant system that for 40 odd years, encumbered Egyptians' natural propensity to invest in property. Years of rent controls have led to a situation where apartment blocks were built for sale and little else. Many of the buildings that comprise the nation's housing stock were left to decay because of rents being frozen at a level that rendered landlords incapable of financing repairs. The situation arose in which the dearest hope of many landlords would be that their building collapsed on the tenants.

This untenable situation was compounded by the ever increasing costs of building materials. Such inflation, combined with rent controls, encouraged landlords to take short cuts. More and more housing blocks were constructed so shoddily that they constituted a danger to their inhabitants.

This situation has given rise to a two-fold tendency. On the one hand investors refrain from investing in the construction of low and middle priced housing. On the other, thousands of luxury flats are left vacant in the anticipation that tenants who might be able to afford their exorbitant rents will one day come along. Both tendencies have contributed to augmenting the current housing shortage.

These were the considerations in the minds of the intellectuals, legislators and economists eager to solve the housing crisis. Needless to say, there is no magic formula that will solve the problem overnight. Rather, what has been attempted is to put in place the legislative necessary to tackle the dilemma we face in a series of precisely calculated, thoroughly considered phases.

Many useful proposals have been made. But logic dictated that we begin with a proper legal framework that, by taking into account past practices, would not lead to unbridled chaos. It is for this reason that the bill of Law 4 of 1996 applies only to those premises that have never before been leased.

New housing legislation promises to restore a sense of vitality to our commercial and social relations, enshrined within viable and legally enforceable contracts. In practical terms, hundreds of thousands of housing units that have been closed up for years will be put on the market. And finally, as investors gain confidence in the potential for returns, they will re-invest in constructing new apartment blocks. Gradually, as supply begins to meet and perhaps outstrip demand, prices will begin to adjust.

Huntington put to the test [2]

A singularity of the Arab-Israeli conflict is that it is not between parties (nations, states, civilisations) that have always lived side by side. Arabs argue that there has been a discontinuity, an absence over centuries of a Jewish entity in their midst. The fact that the conflict is not between entities that have always been there (like, for instance, Germany and France, China and Japan, etc) imbues it with a special time-space framework. It is therefore not only over borders, 'Israel', in time terms, has not enjoyed a permanent presence in the region; and, in space terms, has been displaced from its 'diaspora' form in the other parts of the world (notably Europe) to its 'state' form in the Middle East.

The conflict — and peace — touches on the legitimacy of Israel's existence in the eyes of the original inhabitants of the Middle East. Is Israel's own eyes, the legitimacy of its existence is not a function of the readiness of its environment to accept that existence and recognise its legitimacy. That is at the heart of the conflict, at the heart of the specificity of peace in this conflict. It is also at the heart of the ideology of Zionism. Zionism's basic frame of reference is not humankind taken as a whole, but the specific fate of the Jews. How legitimate is that basic frame of reference in the post-bipolar world 'order'? How to redefine peace in terms of the

Mohamed Sid-Ahmed was invited to a seminar in Berlin where he was asked to discuss whether Huntington's theory of the 'clash of civilisations' applied to the Arab-Israeli conflict. Below is the second and final part of his presentation. The first part was published in last week's issue

Huntington paradigm?

It can be postulated that relations between the protagonists in the Arab-Israeli conflict will go through three stages if peace is to be reached. The first stage is one of mutual rejection whose essence was most aptly captured in the alleged slogans of 'throwing the Jews into the sea' and 'throwing the Arabs into the desert'. The conflict at this stage corresponded perfectly to the Huntington paradigm: civilisations cannot but clash.

The second stage (which can be regarded as the present stage) is a stage of mutual instrumentalisation. The protagonists are subjected to 'peace' constraints that oblige them to deal with the Other, but recognition is only in terms of expediency, not of conviction. During this stage, Huntington's paradigm is not refuted, but assumes a more complex expression. Because neither party (civilisation) can eliminate the Other,

each departs from the pragmatic premise that it may as well use the Other to its own advantage. The balance of power between the parties will determine which of the two will benefit most from the exercise.

The third stage will be the one where mutual instrumentalisation develops into mutual trust and mutual enrichment and cross-fertilisation. Should this third stage ever come to pass, it will effectively disprove Huntington's paradigm, in that it departs from the assumption that it can never materialise. In Huntington's view, such is the intensity of the clash between civilisations, mutual instrumentalisation is the best that can be hoped for, the ultimate threshold that can be reached. In other words, the Huntington paradigm and genuine peace cannot be reconciled.

It could, of course, be argued that this third stage is unlikely to come about because of practical reasons, and not because of the

theoretical premises of the Huntington paradigm. One such argument is that because the balance of power is likely to favour one of the two parties at the expense of the other (because a balance of power in a state of equilibrium is the exception, not the rule), the weaker party will suffer from frustration, and genuine cross-fertilisation between parties in a climate of frustration is impossible. If the breakthrough towards mutual trust and enrichment faces many difficulties, it is less because of cultural/civilisational factors than because of material/strategic/infrastructural factors.

If this Huntington paradigm is true, peace can only be an issue of expediency; it cannot be sustainable. Can the Huntington paradigm be re-defined in the light of present attempts towards realising a Middle East peace?

'Fault lines', to use Huntington's expression, or more generally, 'clashes', need not only be negative. They can also have a positive, creative, impact, which can eventually lead to mutual enrichment. It is so accident that the greatest of Arab thinkers and philosophers (Averroes and Averroes) lived at the periphery, not the heart, of the Islamic world, where cross-fertilisation was possible. It is in confrontation with the culture of the Other that one's own culture has the best chance to achieve leaps forward.

Saturn rising

By Naguib Mahfouz

The year 1943 marked the beginning of my life long association with publishing. Together with my friends I was keen to find a publisher for some short stories we had written. Later this circle of friends came to be called *Al-Harafa*.

Mahmoud Shabana joined the group which used to meet regularly in our favourite place, the Opera Cafe.

Various artists were drawn to the group. Eventually we ended up spending many pleasant evenings in Mohamed Affi's home. At that point the group was more than 20 strong, and included Salah Jahine, Mustafa Mahmoud, Ahmed Bahaddin and Louis Awad.

The events of one particular Thursday evening remain fresh in my mind. On that day Salah Jahine informed us that he was getting married the following Thursday. Mustafa Mahmoud turned his eyes skywards, and claimed he could see Saturn rising, which he interpreted as an inauspicious sign. We simply laughed the matter off.

Three days before Jahine's proposed wedding a far greater event occurred, the ramifications of which were to overshadow our Thursday meetings for years to come. That day was Monday, 5 June 1967. When, later, we met with Jahine, he made no more mention of his marriage.

Based on an interview by Mohamed Salmawy.

The Press This Week

By Hassan Fouad

Economic reforms

ECONOMIC and legislative reforms were the top stories in the national and party press this week.

On Sunday, Al-Akhbar's editorial, entitled "Boosting the Egyptian economy," read: "The policy of liquidating losing public sector companies has two objectives. Firstly, to transform certain companies into profit-making ones and secondly, to ensure that the government will acquire capital for broad investment, creating job opportunities for youth."

In May, mouthpiece of the NDP, Editor-in-Chief Samir Ragab wrote a two-column front-page article in which he said: "Now we can say that among the results of economic reform is that we now have hard currency to pay for imports. This has instilled international confidence in the strength of our economy and inspired many to sign economic agreements with us on the assumption that Egypt has overcome its crisis and has a bright future before it."

Al-Arabi, mouthpiece of the Nasserist Party, attacked the government's economic reform policies. Editor-in-Chief Mahmoud El-Maraghi wrote a two-column front-page article, entitled, "What

remains of the Egyptian state?", in which he said, "I do not oppose a bigger role for the private sector but I object to the profit motive as the prime mover of the economy without considering social and political factors. I am not against some investment and utilising foreign expertise, but this should not be in sensitive sectors which could mean foreign domination."

"The policy of liquidating losing public sector companies has two objectives: firstly, to transform certain companies into profit-making ones and secondly, to ensure that the government will acquire capital for broad investment, creating job opportunities for youth"

Al-Akhbar

tion of the economy. I do not object to free competition between the private and public sectors, but I do object to foreign products killing off Egyptian ones under the banner of open markets and the GATT. The newspaper's banner headline read, "The Nasserist Party rejects the sale of the public sector."

The cover story of the weekly Al-Messawar magazine dealt with the increase in court rulings pronouncing the unconstitutionality of laws. Editor-in-Chief Makram Mohamed wrote a three-page article in

which he said: "Why has legislation become so defective as to require such a great number of appeals against the constitutionality of laws? Fifty per cent of recently passed laws are being questioned as to their constitutionality. This means we face a big problem which requires a revision of both present legislation and the way the judiciary supervises the constitutionality of laws in Egypt."

"There have been appeals against the constitutionality of the consumption duties law after its repeal. And another case before the higher constitutional court is the sales tax law."

"Some of the reasons for the rising number of cases is the haste with which new laws are passed by the People's Assembly. Other reasons concern the legislative authority which depends on its parliamentary majority to get laws passed without allowing enough time to discuss them. Why don't we consider widening the legislative role of the Shura Council in order to polish up draft laws?"

On the same subject, the satirical writer Ahmed Ragab wrote in his weekly front-page column in Akhbar El-Yom: "The higher constitutional court has been de-

claring taxation laws unconstitutional. This is proof that the taxation system needs a major overhaul. The financial statement which the government presented to the People's Assembly in 1995 illustrates an unacceptable tax system which does not differentiate between the baves and have-nots."

"The sales tax needs to be reviewed as it is applied more than once to the same product."

The IMF would not object to tax reform as it does not think very much of the taxation system. What is also needed is the liberation of the Egyptian people from hundreds of fiscal kinds of fiscal duties."

On Wednesday in his weekly column, Salabuddin Hafez reviewed Mohamed Hassanein Heikal's latest book "Secret Channels". The book was published in English in London last month and the Arabic version will appear next month. Under the headline "Peace and its secret channels", Hafez wrote: "In general Heikal presents a pessimistic view of current agreements and doubts their continuity. He says that the relevant sides differ in their understanding of peace and that one side has imposed its understanding on the others

— an unjust peace. "This will open the door to future disturbances by a reactionary Islamist front spurred on by oppression, poverty and sacrifices by the Arabs without achieving a just and comprehensive peace."

"At the end of the 552-page book, Heikal concludes that present Israeli policies have achieved four objectives:

"I do not oppose a bigger role for the private sector, but I object to the profit motive as the prime mover of the economy, without considering social and political factors. I object to foreign products killing off Egyptian ones under the banner of open markets and the GATT"

Mahmoud El-Maraghi

jectives: alienating Egypt from Arab decision-making and the political framework of the region; the expulsion of the PLO from Lebanon; dividing the Arab world into radicals on one hand and conservatives who find themselves in an unwritten alliance with Israel on the other; and Israel's success in persuading some Arabs to accept its definition of peace.

"The present peace is, therefore, just not balanced and does not take into account the historical, religious, and cultural sides of the Arab-Israeli conflict and, therefore,

it will not endure." In his daily column in Al-Ahram, on Sunday Salama Ahmed Salama wrote, under the headline "The Giant Computer", "Israel has rejoined recently at its acquisition of a giant computer from the US. It had wanted the computer for some time and the US had forbidden its sale abroad for fear that it should be used to produce nuclear weapons."

The question is: what is the position of Arab states towards the world of giant computers, a world in which Israel feels at home with its cadres of experts and scientists and with covert US assistance. Can Egypt get the same computer under the 'partnership' accords signed with Al Gore recently?

On the forthcoming three-way summit between President Mubarak, Yasser Arafat and King Hussein, Al-Gomhuria said editorially: "If the idea for the summit originated in the meeting between President Mubarak and King Hussein last Thursday, it embodies positive elements to which the Arab citizen aspires in completing the peace process, getting rid of divisive factors and entering the 21st century assured of an honourable place among the world's nations."

Close up

Salama A. Salama

In the rumour mill

The Jordanian media have sought to give the impression that talks between King Hussein and President Mubarak, held in Cairo a few days ago, were dominated by the subject of the possibility of internal changes in Iraq. Jordan's media have repeatedly insinuated the claim that Egypt might be part of a plan being formulated between King Hussein, the US and other Arab parties to overthrow the current Iraqi regime.

Such insinuations are hardly supported by the clear and precise answers President Mubarak gave to questions posed by Jordanian journalists. Then he stated that Egypt stood with the Iraqi people in their sufferings and would not intervene in Iraq's affairs. Yet speculation in Jordan has reached fever pitch, and the suggestion that there is a movement inside Iraq which is on the verge of ousting the Iraqi regime with American-Arab support is oft repeated. And the sources responsible for such rumours have fully exploited King Hussein's recent visits to both Saudi Arabia and Egypt to lend weight to their predictions.

The confusions propagated in Jordan were further compounded by the announcement that the Jordanian authorities had allowed one of the main Iraqi opposition factions to move the base of its operations from London to Amman. The move seems to lend weight to comments by US Defence Secretary William Perry on Jordan's determination to play a fundamental role in effecting the overthrow of the Iraqi regime.

The first hints of the role Jordan would like to play were given when Saddam Hussein's two sons-in-law fled with their families to Amman. After the asylum seekers arrived, Jordan was likely to have begun to move quickly on several fronts, though it proved unable to extract any real political capital from the arrival of the dissidents.

Suggestions that something is indeed afoot appear to be reinforced by the build up of American forces in the Gulf region, and there is certainly no reason not to believe that the Americans would be happy to see Saddam out of power before he is in a position to benefit from the implementation of UN resolution 986, which would allow Iraq to sell off limited quantities of oil in exchange for food imports.

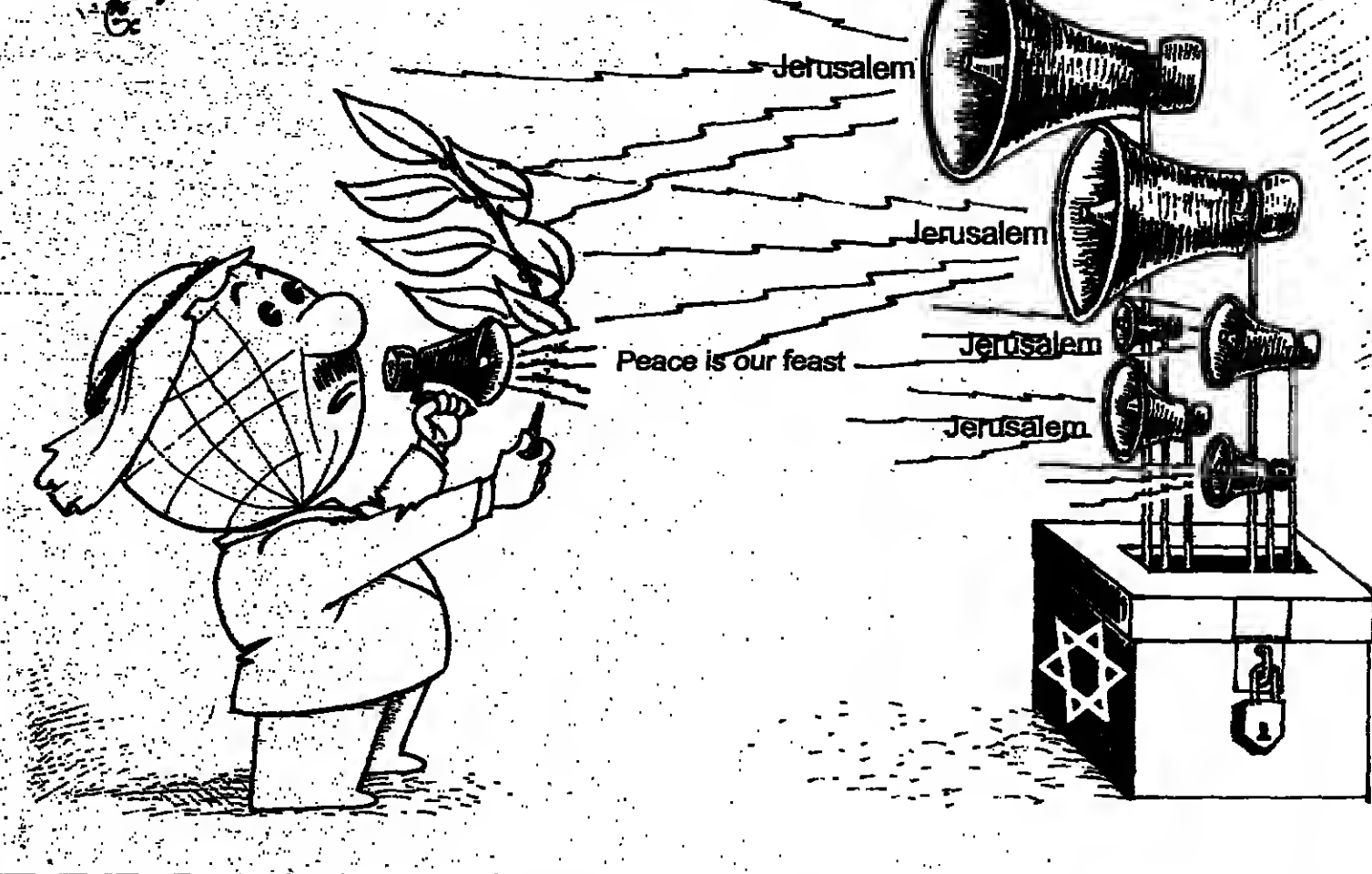
Of course, King Hussein is perfectly free to follow a course that he perceives as being in Jordan's national interest, just as he is entitled to seek a bigger regional role for his country.

The wisest course for Egypt, however, may well be to distance itself from plots that are at once risky and also appear to work in the benefit of foreign interests. It became imperative, therefore, for Egypt to dispel the rumours circulating in Jordan, and to call a spade a spade. Such rumours were, Egyptian officials announced, misconceptions.

Whatever damage results from the continuation of Saddam's regime, the damage of forcefully intervening to change the situation would have more serious consequences. The Arab world has passed through some painful experiences over the last four decades. Arab regimes have been subjected to intervention from abroad, whether at the suggestion of foreign powers or because of latent hostilities between Arab rulers themselves. The interests and wishes of the Arab peoples have not received the slightest consideration. And in all cases the result has been an exacerbation of Arab weakness and an unmitigated disaster for the Arab populations involved.

Whatever justifications can be found for toppling the Iraqi regime, the responsibility for overthrowing it lies with the Iraqi people, and with them alone. Rescuing the Iraqi population from its present state of hunger and exhaustion might be a useful first step.

Gomaa



Bosnia: staring into the future

The Dayton Accord is being implemented unfairly. Fairer implementation requires pressure from Islamic countries, argues Eqbal Ahmad

Events of the last four weeks reveal the persistence of the ambition and ideas which resulted in genocide in the Balkans. They also expose the flaws of Dayton Accord which treats the acknowledged aggressors and their victims as equals, and concedes to Serb leaders their goal of setting up an 'ethnically cleansed' state in a large part of Bosnia. Unless the international community, especially its Islamic component, addresses the problem in a systematic and vigorous fashion chances are that the conflict will resume on a bigger, possibly bloodier, scale.

FIRST A REVIEW OF THE EVENTS: 24 January, during an appearance on the *Jim Lehrer News Hour*, Warren Christopher threatened to 'halt the United States' promised military and financial aid to Bosnia unless its government released all Serb prisoners of war in its custody and expelled from Bosnia an estimated 300 foreign Muslims, mostly Iranians, who had fought with Bosnian units and some of whom have married Bosnians and wish to stay on. The Dayton Accord does provide for exchange of prisoners, and requires the departure of all foreign forces. The Bosnian government is reluctant to expel, against their wish, men who had aided Bosnia in its darkest hour while Europe and the US had rendered it virtually helpless against genocide by maintaining an embargo on arms to Bosnia. They are, perhaps, mindful also of not alienating Iran whose help they might need again in another lonely battle for survival.

So they proposed to offer citizenship to those few who wished to remain. The Dayton Accord can be read as forbidding it. But international precedent support the practice. Many governments have routinely accorded rights of citizenship to foreigners who fought their wars either as volunteers or as mercenaries. Veterans of France's famous Foreign Legion routinely became French citizens. Americans who joined the British army before the US entered World War II were accorded British citizenship. In the US, this became a practice from the inception of the republic when soldiers in General Lafayette's army earned the privilege of becoming Americans. So why not allow the same convention to Bosnia? Nothing doing, said American officials, accusing Bosnia's government of playing a 'double game' — getting support from both the US and Iran. The next week Warren Christopher was in Sarajevo twisting Bosnian arms. The outcome is not known. Iran would do well to let Bosnia off the squeeze; the ensuing good will would be worth more than the presence in Bosnia of two hundred Iranian bodies.

In the matter of prisoner exchange the US put another unique pressure on Bosnia that ran counter to its past practice, and also in its pet diplomatic theory. Bosnia argued that it could not release all Serb prisoners by the date specified by Dayton, 19 January, unless the Serbs release or give an account for those Bosnians who are missing and, Bosnia believes, are still lingering in captivity. Bosnia also insists that, as required by Dayton, the Serbs hand over to the International War Crimes Tribunal in the Hague those 45 Serbs whom the tribunal

has already indicted for war crimes and aid in the investigation of others.

But NATO is not keen on implementing this part of the accord. NATO's commanding officer, Admiral Leighton W. Smith has been reluctant in aid in securing the sites of mass graves and atrocities. The United States rejects the notion of 'linkage' — its own favorite device — between one provision of the treaty and another. Bosnia must comply irrespective of what the Serbs do, or else. To insure compliance was Mr. Christopher's mission. Before and during his visit hundreds of Bosnian mothers and wives marched, protested, and pleaded before UN and NATO offices for information on their missing relatives. American newsmen did a commendable job of reporting their grief and, in some cases, found credible evidence that the unfortunate prisoners were still alive. We do not know if these witnesses influenced the secretary of state.

ON 6 FEBRUARY BOSNIAN frustrations translated into yet another crisis. The Dayton accord permits free passage to both sides in and out of Sarajevo and its suburbs. It also allows all three sides to apprehend persons accused of war crimes. The Bosnian government captured two senior Serb officials who had stayed into a Bosnian held area — General Djordje Djukic, an aide to General Ratko Mladic and commander-in-chief of the Bosnian Serb army, himself an indicted war criminal, and Col. Krstanovic — claiming that they had not only committed war crimes but also participated in organising them.

Sarajevo promptly invited the Hague Tribunal to examine the evidence. Equally promptly Brigadier Andrew Cumming, the British officer-in-charge of NATO forces' Joint Operations Centre called the Bosnian action 'provocative and inflammatory'. Serbs denounced the arrests, broke off contact with Bosnia's government, and threatened to scuttle the accord. Under pressure to release the officers, the Bosnian government held out. The close circle of crisis was fortunately opened by an expeditious reply from the Hague: hold the accused. We shall examine their case. A good precedent has been established. Hopefully, the great powers will let the matter stand there.

Meanwhile the Serbs have started testing NATO's resolve as they had once tested the United Nations' bringing the world organisation to heel and rendering its mandate meaningless. Thus, on 8 February, Chris Hedges of the *New York Times* reported from Iltiza that 'nearly every night for the last two weeks in this Serbian suburb men have fired on NATO peace keepers' vehicles grazing several soldiers and shattering windshields.' There have been other incidents elsewhere and so far there has been no riposte from NATO. The pattern described above, suggests a policy of appeasement quite similar to that pursued by the UN with such disastrous consequences.

LAST WEEK THE SERBS broke contact with NATO's

commanders, ended their boycott briefly after Richard Holbrooke, the American mediator who had cobbled the Dayton Accord, returned to the Balkans on a trouble shooting mission, and resumed it soon after he left. Ratko Mladic, the Serb commander in Bosnia who is an indicted war criminal, says that the boycott of NATO will continue until General Djukic and Colonel Krstanovic, war crime suspects, now in the custody of the International War Crime Tribunal in the Hague, are released. A Serb sniper fired at the first bus to leave Sarajevo — as agreed in Dayton — critically wounding a passenger and also the driver.

Although Bosnia's government promised to apprehend only those who were already indicted for war crimes by the International Tribunal, the Serbs continued to shoot sporadically at NATO vehicles and lobbed a grenade at its barracks in Iltiza, a Serb held suburb of Sarajevo. NATO officials protested these violations while maintaining a posture of appeasement. They did, nevertheless, appear embarrassed when newsmen reported that Radovan Karadzic, the Serb leader indicted for war crimes by the Hague Tribunal, had fired several NATO check points on his way to Banja Luka. Under the Dayton Accord NATO forces are required to aid in apprehending indicted war criminals. Two days later NATO claimed to have discovered an Iranian 'terrorist training centre' in Sarajevo. Bosnia's government denied charges of harboring terrorists.

The Dayton Accord is not doing well on the Croatian-Bosnian front either. Croats are not happy and balk at every turn. Dayton requires the reunification of Mostar, the divided city of which a large part was 'ethnically cleansed' of Muslims by Croat nationalists. But Croats do not want to reunite, and oppose the Muslim-Croat Federation which was engineered by the US, and on which the Dayton Accord rests. Journalists have been reporting widespread rejection by Croat religious and political leaders of Dayton throughout western Bosnia. Feelings of victimisation, antipathy in Islam, and sympathy for the fascist ideals of World War II run deep among Croat leaders. One typical view is quoted by Mike O'Connor of the *New York Times*: 'The Reverend Ante Maric said opposition to the peace agreement was part of the Bosnian Croats' historic effort to defend Christianity against Islam, to protect the West from the East.'

BOSNIANS DEMAND THAT THE ACCORD be observed in its entirety, and not on a piece by piece basis so that freedom of travel must be respected along with the commitment to apprehend war criminals and that the requirements to exchange prisoners must not be separated from the obligation to account for thousands of missing people many of whom are in Serb custody. A synthesis of incompatible needs and ambitions, Dayton is likely to collapse unless its underwriters — the NATO powers — remain firmly committed to upholding it fairly. The great danger is that they will again lean on Bosnia, and pressure it to surrender even more in sectarian ambitions than it has done already. Among the European powers there is

Soapbox

To legitimise plurality

The Arab world — like everywhere else — must come to terms with globalisation, with the gradual erosion of the role of nation states and the increasing marginalisation of national policy makers. Indeed a number of analysts have gone so far as to refer to the nation state as no more than a conveyor belt, a useful channel between the international order, with its global markets and mechanisms, and smaller regional blocs.

It should be noted, though, that this stark economic and political globalisation tends towards a new type of totalitarianism. Pluralism, and the provision of space for cultural difference, are mitigated against in an international arena that lacks the will to differentiate between the cultural heritage, patterns of development and intellectual roots of individual societies.

We must ask whether the globalisation of production and capital markets, combined with the information revolution, provides sufficient justification for the imposition of a single paradigm of economic and political organisation. And if we answer in all good faith, our answers are bound to be negative. It is a matter of common sense — there simply cannot be a single frame of reference, a hegemonic equation, by which progress and development is legitimised.

There is a clear paradox, as an yet unresolved tension, between the desire to promote pluralism within individual states, and the impulse towards globalism which acts to negate pluralism and which denies difference. And the tensions are, of course, ideological. To illustrate the paradox: all states are the same when it comes in the ways in which they are expected to convert in capitalism, all states are clearly not the same when it comes to the possession of nuclear capabilities.

This week's Soapbox speaker is professor of economics at Cairo University.



Mahmoud Abdel-Fadil

reforms

When love is blind

Adel Hussein concludes the series of articles on Islamism and secularism launched several weeks ago on the pages of Al-Ahram Weekly

The majority of those calling for the Islamic solution are not calling for the establishment of an Islamic theocracy. Rather, what they are advocating is the establishment of a civilian authority that is founded on the tenets and precepts of Islamic law.

Every culture or society is united by a set of general moral tenets. And every culture or society has the potential to evolve into a theocracy, an evolution that requires the subdivision of general moral tenets into specific laws and codes of conduct administered by a central figure or body empowered with the absolute authority to dictate how these laws and codes of conduct are implemented.

Such an evolution, of course, leads itself to despotism. Absolute authority can lead to the arbitrary imposition of penalties and acts to deprive mankind, individually and collectively, of his free and unfettered participation in developing the earth through his God-given faculties, his initiative and creativity.

Of course, the potential for such absolutist systems are not only inherent in those cultures that cherish the divinely revealed religions. In our own day and age we witnessed how atheistic communism gave birth to such tyrannies.

Tyranny in the name of God, or in the name of a more quotidian ideology, must be avoided at all costs. The question we must pose ourselves then is whether we want a civilian government based on the

general tenets and values of Islam or a civilian government based on the general tenets and values of secularism, western fashion.

Secularism implies the severing of the connection between religion and the conduct of worldly affairs. God, the other world, the day of judgement — these are made to count for nothing in determining right from wrong. The triumph of secularism, which I think reached its apogee in the West during the early sixties, with the decline of the role of church institutions, and the dwindling of those Christian ethics that had previously governed public comportment; coincided, in Egypt and elsewhere, with a resurgence in calls to re-elevate Islam as the prime determinant of individual and public behaviour.

Confronted with glaring examples of the limitations of secularism in the West, it became increasingly apparent that we had a far preferable alternative by which human life could be regulated. For centuries the interaction of Muslim societies with the written codes of Islam, as embodied in the Qur'an and the *Sunna* of the Prophet, resulted in deep-seated and profoundly revered traditions and values. If some of these traditions and values fell into decline when Arab civilisation itself declined, the current revival is more than capable of restoring their vigour. The general set of tenets that binds an Islamic society, and the codes and principles of law that have been evolved through the process of conjecture, enjoin mankind to compassion in the government of its affairs. They set the course towards the fulfilment of justice, without discrimination on the bases of ethnic origin or gender.

Given the force with which such traditions have held sway in society, we should not be surprised that they are held dear and cherished by, among others, non-Muslims and non-practising Muslims. These people, we could, perhaps, term national secularists. (Most Zionists in Israel could, indeed, be usefully characterised in the same way since they are Jewish by tradition, rather than through religious conviction.)

As an advocate of the Islamic solution, I have no bones to pick with this category of individuals. This is not, however, the case with those Muslims who couple the fragility of their relationship to religion with their infatuation with the late version of Western secularism, even given its decadent state. Such is their infatuation that they are blind to the other face of this version of secularism — its arrogance, racism and exploitation of the Arab nation and the South in general. These people, I believe, are the true enemies of any genuine cultural revival in Egypt and the Arab World.

The writer is the secretary-general of the Islamist-oriented Labour Party.

Fixing the borders

To develop mechanisms capable of resolving border disputes is an urgent need, argues Ahmed Sidqi Al-Dijani

The question of political borders in the Arab and Islamic worlds must be prioritised on the agendas of the region's political thinkers. Every aspect of the issue should be subjected to thorough scrutiny and analysis, with the aim of formulating mechanisms that could effectively come into play in settling future border disputes. But for such mechanisms to work, they must take on board contemporary notions of the integrity of political borders and national sovereignty in addition to the problematics that are all too often cited in contested areas of abutment.

In the final days of 1995, we were once again reminded of the urgent need to consolidate mechanisms capable of dealing with such disputes when the region's newest member, Eritrea, invaded Hanish Island in the Red Sea, taking the Yemeni forces stationed there prisoner. A flurry of diplomatic activity was triggered, aimed at containing the crisis before it escalated into a full scale border war between Yemen and Eritrea. The Arab League, the Organisation of African Unity and the UN all moved into action in an attempt to contain the conflict.

While tensions ebbed when the Yemeni captives were returned, such border disputes remain a threat to the stability of the region. They are like a burning ember beneath a pile of dry timber. At any point the conflagration can arise.

It would not only be foolish but dangerous to underestimate the threats posed by unresolved border disputes. Though such disputes are as old as history, with the emergence of the modern nation state and the triumph of concepts of national integrity, they are erupting with increasing frequency and with ever greater intensity.

There is little comfort to be taken from the

fact that the majority of border disputes among member nations of the UN still remain unresolved. Within the past decade alone, the world has seen such disputes erupt into full scale international conflicts, notable among which were the Falklands War and the two Gulf wars.

There is, perhaps, some ground for optimism in the development of generally accepted principles for resolving such disputes. The Helsinki Agreement, for example, which was signed in 1975, contains an article addressed towards the maintenance of existing borders, and enshrining the principle that stable political boundaries are a fundamental condition for security and cooperation. The charter of the Organisation of African Unity also contains an article which stipulates that existing political borders must be secured and respected.

Within the Arab and Islamic worlds, there is barely a single nation that is safe from the problems that will ensue if such border disputes are allowed to escalate into large scale conflicts. In our own region the emergence of modern nation states in the twentieth century contributed to sharpening the intensity of such disputes, which over the previous thirteen centuries had been dealt with within the context of the larger Arab caliphate. Indeed, as we examine the question of borders today, it would be beneficial to draw on our collective history in this regard. Acquiring thorough and comprehensive knowledge on the issue of international borders will require a concerted effort. It is an effort we have to make.

The writer is an Arab Palestinian intellectual, and member of the PLO's Central Council.

vents to come, Al-Ahram Weekly gives an overview of the entertainments offered during the fast and the feast

A shot in the foot

Mohamed Shebl plots the genesis of an overly contrived genre, the *Eid* film

There is one constant in Egyptian cinema and it is this — whenever anyone, anywhere, tries to solve problems he or she ends up botching things and making them even more complicated than they already are. The list of calamities is long and could easily fill a celluloid encyclopedia of what-not-to-do's, but here it will suffice to focus on that most wretched of all creations: the *Eid* film.

In the beginning... well in the beginning matters were more or less normal. *Lassie Come Home*, *Gone With The Wind* or their equivalents would be shown during *Eid*. It was simply a matter of common sense that distributors would refrain from screening some depressing social drama about cancer or Susan Hayward kicking the booze habit, and screen instead *Jason and the Argonauts* or *Seventh Voyage of Sindbad*. If an Arabic film was to be screened, the distributor or movie-house owner would almost certainly opt for either a Laila Mourad musical extravaganza, Anwar Wagdi action-packed kitsch or a saucy Farouz-the-miracle-baby song and dance tear-jerker.

A gentlemen's agreement existed between distributors on where and when to show what. Everything went along smoothly until the June 1967 War when the entire Egyptian film industry rapidly and hopelessly, it seemed, came to a grinding halt. Instead of sitting the war out, film makers quickly, and erroneously it later seemed, came to the decision that it was time to abandon ship. There was a mass exodus to Beirut, which at the time seemed like the ideal place. It was close enough to Egypt, just in case. It had beautiful natural scenery, an extremely lax censorship department, and was the only other Arab country with a film industry of sorts.

Unfortunately the move backfired. For starters, the lesson was learned, the hard way, that amateurs a decent cohesive feature film do not make. Not by any stretch of the imagination. The films churned out during this period were so lacking in quality, cinematography, sound, editing, acting, etc. that today they look like expensive home videos.

On another point, the lax censorship laws, again the plan backfired. Maybe it was intended to make creative artists like the ones Visconti, Fellini and Bergman were doing in Europe? What we got, however, were just badly processed films coloured in hospital green, overly fussy and often bordering on soft-core pornography. Suffice it to say that today these films cannot find a decent movie theatre to screen them.

Another outcome of the move was the destruction of the cinema careers of many an actor or actress. Some of these actors realised that what they had done was so bad that they decided to repent by moving on to Turkey. But what was done there was no better and spine tingling the less said about it the better, and may these skeletons be left to rot in their decaying and rusty film cans.

This mass exodus of Egyptian film makers to Beirut and Ankara also led to a drop in output from roughly 80 to 90 films a year to an average of between 50 and 60 films. This was the first time the industry had experienced such a steep fall in production.

It was in the aftermath of the 1967 War, too, that the Indian film was introduced into the local market. True, one or two Indian films had been screened before that date, the most prominent of which was *Mother India* with the fabled star Nargis, but it wasn't until *Sangam*, followed by *Surya*, in '67 and '68 respectively, that matters took a sudden turn towards the sub-continent. Producers and distributors were jolted awake. But before they had time to say "chop chop" the kung-fu, karate and martial arts film had arrived from Hong Kong.

It was Dilip Kumar in one theatre and Bruce Lee in the second. American distributors, wearied with what they conceived as an erratic and politically unstable market, went to hell. The Egyptian film, still suffering from post-Beirut syndrome, seemed to cave-in and collapse. Instead of fighting it out, it opted for the "run to mama" option. The government responded, and seeing her child asphyxiating from an overdose of curry and soy sauce, came running to the rescue.

A hastily written "law" was passed, in the mid-'70s, stipulating that henceforth only Egyptian films would be screened during both *Eids*. But like all hastily written laws with hardly any thought or research put into it, the plan to "save the Egyptian film industry" was bound to backfire.

Local film producers and distributors were assured that whatever drive they belched out, no matter the quality, was guaranteed screening, if at least for one week. Why one week I hear you ask? Because yet another hasty law was passed making it obligatory to show the film "back home" first before exporting it abroad, in this case meaning Saudi Arabia, the main market for Egyptian films. Sadly this plan, too, backfired because with the advent of the VCR smuggling films became, so to speak, a piece of cake. So while the film technically waited for some *Eid* or other to get official permission for export, every corner grocery stall in Jeddah had the film on rental. In fact disdain of this law became so widespread that producers didn't even bother to screen the film for a week. They lumped together seven films and made a "new film festival" in some God forsaken barn and ran every film for just one day to get the export papers and have done with it.

And smuggling also became an art form. The distributors sometimes didn't even bother to pay for the smuggled copy. They just demanded a preview of the film and as they sat through the solitary seance, their "man" in the projection booth, after having bribed the projectionist, simply pirated reels three and four, and after screening them, reels one and two and so on. Back home, the magic of video editing did the rest.

This led to an even faster shrinking market for films. The Saudis and Gulf distributors cut the going price by 50 percent. The repercussions on the local film budget can be imagined. But it wasn't until the launching of satellites that the industry was good and buried. These satellites, by then rotating the galaxies in their hundreds, beamed saturation coverage of new and old films.

The old films were being sold off like salvation army



Eids past: Anwar Wagdi and Laila Mourad

surplus, literally for a couple of hundred pounds. The new ones, still the same tired nonsense, were being churned out at a much lower speed and with even lower budgets. The solution that was supposed to fly faster than a speeding bullet had ricocheted right in the face of it's shooter. In other words, the plan had backfired.

Now the net result was an Egyptian film with a runaway budget thanks to overhead costs and a star system

audience. But lest anyone lose the point, *Eid* lasts for only four days, after which things quieten down and settle back to normality.

And the "Egyptian films only" law is being quietly ignored, silently consigned to the trash can which is the ultimate fate of any legislation that is rushed and ill-conceived. Look at what films are actually on offer this *Eid*. And guess what. They are not all Egyptian.

which had, incidentally, been created by the same distributors that were now refusing to buy the films because they were too expensive. We also had newly privatised theatres that had undergone major and expensive face lifts, and had to recoup the costs of renovation. We had an Arab distribution system that simply wrote off first run films and opted for later and cheaper satellite screenings, and we had a movie-going audience that had had it up to here with drive-in, Indian and Hong Kong films included.

Enter the Hollywood monsters, the new batch.

By now Hollywood had perfected computer graphics and special effects and had found a dramatic solution to the dilemma engendered by Stallone, Schwarzenegger, Van Damme et al being unable to deliver lines in coherent English. So how fares our local films? Against all odds, quite nicely, thank you.

Burgeoning costs led to the death of the cheapie. A system has been created to rake in as much cash as possible in the shortest span of time, hence the Hollywood style saturation-screening patterns which are now followed. (Adel Imam's new film is running in 20 local theatres).

Subject matter has also undergone a drastic change. Films now discuss the once taboo subject of fundamentalism and the social disturbances that go along with it. This *Eid* all the new films discuss the volatile, by Middle-Eastern standards, subject of sex, impotency and the like.

So there is something positive coming out of this quagmire. Except of course the white elephant known as "films of the *Eid*", which are supposed to cater to a mostly male, mostly young, loud

Plain Talk

The literary world seems to be preoccupied these days with the major issue of copyright. In Europe and America, as well as here in Egypt, the problem is under discussion both by writers and governments.

The copyright issue has always been a bone of contention not only between authors and publishers, but also between countries. I remember the time when Russian translations of Egyptian novels were published in the Soviet Union without the permission of the author or Egyptian publisher. An Egyptian novelist who discovered that one of his books had met with that fate was offered a copyright fee to be paid in rubles inside the Soviet Union!

Recently the GATT initiated various campaigns concerning the copyright of both books and audio-visual material. Rules were laid down and signatories to the agreement had to follow. It is interesting to note that the United States acceded to the terms of the Berne Convention only in 1988 while China has only in the very recent past agreed to them.

During the last few months the copyright issue came up once again. This time the discussion revolves around the principle, now an accepted one, that copyright for artistic works endures for 50 years after the creator's death and after that no copyright fee has to be paid. What has brought up this issue, according to the Western press, is the European Union's newly issued set of rules proposing, in lieu of the 50 year period, a period of 70 years.

This new regulation, which would bring all European nations in line with the German policy, would apply retrospectively to works in which copyright had already been lost. Under this regulation, according to the British *Daily Telegraph*, creative works by writers who died between 1925 and 1945 would return to copyright. This includes such writers as D H Lawrence, James Joyce, Rudyard Kipling, Thomas Hardy and Virginia Woolf, to name but a few.

While some copyright owners and publishers are happy to have an extra 20 years of revenue, other people will certainly suffer. Non-payment of copyright is what makes it possible for publishers to issue cheap editions and hence to target a wider readership.

With the Copyright Tribunal busy with all kinds of court cases that have been brought up to it for arbitration, it is not unlikely that this copyright issue may well be one of the topics discussed in the seminars of the forthcoming Cairo International Book Fair.

Mursi Saad El-Din

Upping the raunch factor

The *Eid* is a period of festivities, of eating out and going to the movies. And it is seen by many producers as the ideal time to release new films. But what films? *Al-Ahram Weekly* finds out

"Give 'em what they want." So said Louis B Mayer, a man who knew more than most about what makes a box office hit. So what does the *Eid* audience want?

If the films released in the last few years are anything to go by this mass audience is deemed to want either comedy or action, preferably with music, definitely laced with sex.

The four films that comprise this year's *Eid* releases do not depart from this usual pattern. They all have a fairly high raunch factor, either in subject matter or the inclusion of endless beach and belly dancing sequences.

Three of the four films count on their male leads to pull in the crowds. Naturally enough, though, they include secondary roles for young actresses, the accent being on their physical appearance rather than acting skills.

Al-Nom Fil-Asal (Sound Asleep) comes up with a neat equation. Sexual impotence, it seems to suggest, is a result of political disenfranchisement and frustration. Wahid Hamed, scriptwriter and producer of the film, appears to be seeking to replicate the formula of his earlier, runaway success *Terrorism and Kebob*. It, like "Sound Asleep", starred Adel Imam, and was directed by Sherif Arafa.

In much the same way Ahmed Zaki's new release *Istakozza* (Lobsters) appears to hark back to an earlier box office smash, *Kaboria* (Crabs). The taste for exo-skeletal titles apart, both films share the same co-stars, Ragda and Hussein El-Imam. It is the latter who is responsible for the soundtrack of "Lobsters". Fingers will be crossed that it might duplicate the success of "Crabs", the music from which was, for an entire summer, inescapable. Not only that, but Ahmed Zaki's hairstyle in the film turned into an instant fashion and, until this very day, youngsters ask hairdressers for the *Kaboria* haircut.

Unlike its fellow crustacean, *Istakozza* is based on the plot of Shakespeare's *Taming Of The Shrew*, which has already been adapted for the Egyptian screen and television several times. So who is likely to be asking their barber for a lobster?

According to El-Sayed El-Alfi, manager of the Diana film theatre since 1966, the *Eid* audience has, in recent years, come to comprise manual labourers and out-of-towners, people visiting Cairo for the period of the feast. It is these people who occupy the majority of seats, not just in downtown theatres but throughout the city, says El-Alfi. Women are seldom seen in cinemas at this time. And the family outing to the cinema is virtually a sight from the past.

In the past we always showed Anwar Wagdi in his musical, light films, and a little later the Farid Shawqi action films. These were the *Eid* films of the '50s, '60s and '70s, says El-Alfi. "Films then used to star seven or eight major actors and actresses. Given current fees that would be impossible, hence our reliance on films with one big name to pull in the audiences."



Eid present: billboards advertising among other films, Ragda and Ahmed Zaki's *Istakozza*, left, and Nour El-Sherif's *Al-Horoub Ila Al-Qemma*, right

Cinema Diana could have chosen from four vehicles this *Eid*, starring Adel Imam, Ahmed Zaki, Nur El-Sherif or Fifi Abdou.

Abdou's vehicle, *Al-Ghagar* (The Gypsies), was written by Magda Khairallah, who made her name as a film critic, writing caustically about productions that relied on belly dancers and muscle-bound heroes for their appeal. Yet here she is, scripting a film for that doyenne of belly-dancers, Fifi Abdou, accompanied in her celluloid outing by El-Shahat Mabrouk, the international body-building champion.

The period between the end of the Cairo Film Festival and the *Eid* has been a dry one for Cairo's cinemas. Many of them have been looking forward to the *Eid* to break this desultory patch, especially those earmarked for the Adel Imam release. Such is the actor's popularity that over 20 theatres will be premiering his film, many of them booked the day shooting began. It is perhaps this blanket coverage of *Al-Nom Fil-Asal* that explains why only three other films are competing in this year's *Eid* stakes. Producers who had films ready over a year and a half ago never really got the chance to re-

serve a decent movie theatre for the release. Khairi Bisham, whose film was scheduled to be released in the *Eid*, could find no theatre to screen *Isharat Morour* — "Traffic Light", winner of the silver pyramid at the 19th Cairo Film Festival. It is unlikely that he was the only director to find himself in this position.

But according to El-Alfi it is all a matter of supply and demand; an Adel Imam film is in great demand and therefore receives blanket exposure.

"As soon as I have the chance to show a new Adel Imam film I jump at the opportunity. His

films cover production expenses in only four or five days which means the movie theatre will certainly make excellent profits," he states.

Despite Imam's superstar status, however, Nouredin Mohamed, manager of Lido film theatre, insists: "As far as I am concerned, *Al-Nom Fil-Asal* would present a problem for me: it is rated for adults only. Inevitably, this will reduce the number of viewers. The screenings will be supervised by a member of the censorship bureau. The presence of a single child could cause huge problems for me which is why I refused to show the Adel Imam film."

"The fact that my film is certified for adults eliminates any problems with children in the *Eid*. Children will simply not be able to watch it either during the *Eid* or on any other day. The theme of the film would be too difficult for anyone under 16 to grasp," comments Wahid Hamed.

Families, then, could not go and see what looks like the feast's blockbuster together even if they wanted to. But would they want to?

For several years now families seem to have boycotted movie theatres during the *Eid*, preferring to delay their viewing until the feast is over, or even until the film becomes available on video. "While youngsters and manual workers crowd the film theatres, families opt for amusement parks, and restaurants," confirms Mohamed.

But the *Eid*, after all, lasts only four days. The real test of success comes after the feast, when it becomes clear which films retain their drawing power. Adel El-A'sar, director of *Al-Horoub Ila Al-Qemma* (Escape To The Top) insists that there is no such thing as an *Eid* film.

"My film is a political film, as far as could be from the stereotype of the commercial *Eid* film. If it succeeds, it will succeed on its own merits not because of its release date."

Al-Horoub Ila Al-Qemma stars Nour El-Sherif, who despite receiving two best actor awards over the past two years, has found it difficult to repeat the box-office successes that regularly punctuated his early career. Every one hopes this latest film will mark the turnaround. But should El-Sherif be upset if the first four days' takings are out as high as expected. Not necessarily, thinks Adel El-A'sar, who explains that the release of big productions has to be planned very carefully. No producer, after all, is likely to be content with the profits of just four days.

Compiled by Mohamed El-Assiouti, Ingy El-Kashef and Hani Mustafa

Blurred identities

Al-Ahram Weekly speaks with Samir Sarhan, head of the General Egyptian Book Organisation, and other leading players in the publishing industry, about their hopes and fears for this year's book fair

Though it is over a quarter of a century old, the Cairo International Book Fair, that annual mega-event, continues to suffer from an amorphous definition, engendering problems to which the forthcoming 28th round (24 February-3 March) is heir. Is it primarily a cultural festival — with its seminars by celebrity intellectuals, poetry readings, and cultural café programme? Or is it a giant book market? Is it a regional Arab event or an international one, writ large in the diaries of publishers from Sydney to New York?

Although the fair proclaims itself as "international", the international publishers to which it has played host in recent years have been predominantly those of textbooks, though it remains a landmark on the Arab front. This year, however, there has been considerable anxiety that the participation of international publishers will dwindle further with the postponement of the fair from early January to late February. Officially the fair was postponed due to economic reasons related to Ramadan, though the decision is rumoured to have been dictated by security considerations in the wake of the parliamentary elections.

With the rescheduling, not only is the fair to last for only 10 days instead of the two weeks of previous years, but it will

not open to the public until after the *Eid* (feast). Many feel that such timing bodes ill since potential fair-goers are likely, after the expense of the holiday, to have little spare cash. But if the rescheduling has left a mark on the international reputation of the fair, to what extent has it affected local book sales prior to the fair? According to Rawia Abdel-Azim of Dar Sina Lil-Nashr, "traditionally, starting from November, book sales drop as publishers leave books in storage. So the postponement will have affected sales".

On the eve of the event, however, Samir Sarhan, head of the state-run publishing house the General Egyptian Book Organisation (GEB), under whose auspices the fair is held, feels confident about the 28th round.

"Initially there was a state of confusion, naturally. Some of the foreign publishers had other commitments scheduled for the period to which we had postponed, but they were very understanding about the circumstances of Egypt and the Arab world during Ramadan, and things are now back to normal and they are all participating," asserts Sarhan. In terms of scope, the fair, in Sarhan's opinion "is of course the biggest book fair in the Arab world, and that includes the level of international participation." He endorses this

assertion with figures: out of the 2,400 publishers participating this year, 1,700 are international publishing houses — evidence, he finds "of international interest in the fair and in Cairo as a cultural metropolis".

As for local publishers, the fair presents an annual success from the chronic problems of the publishing industry in Egypt — high production costs, bad distribution, a general public whose standard of living is such that books are considered a luxury item. Both Abdel-Azim of Dar Sina Lil-Nashr, and Hosni Sulaiman, owner of Dar Sharqiyat, testify to the difficulty of distribution outside Cairo, in the so-called provinces.

"The fair offers access to customers from the provinces where there are hardly any distribution outlets. Those that do exist are in any case reluctant to risk distributing the kind of books we publish — they say: I don't want my kiosk to be burned down," comments Abdel-Azim. Dar Sina Lil-Nashr, then, which has specialised in publishing polemical, controversial studies with an anti-Islamist bent by such authors as the late Farag Foda, Nasr Hamed Abu Zeid and Sayed El-Qimani, views the fair as a way to contact customers whose local outlets would not stock its publications. But inadequate

distribution networks, do not effect just controversial texts.

Sulaiman, founder and owner of Dar Sharqiyat, which since its inception in 1991 has become the foremost publisher of distinguished literary works by authors across the generations, with a policy towards encouraging young writers, has an equally difficult time selling his house's products.

"As for distribution outside Cairo," he comments, "I did a field survey in Damietta. There was one small bookshop in the downtown area — but then how many millions live in Damietta? A city like Tanta has no big bookshop. As for Alexandria, with its five million inhabitants, it has only a handful of bookshops. Even Cairo, with a population twice that of Sweden, has alarmingly few outlets given the potential size of the market." Believing in the importance of production standards involving costs "that we cannot demand that the reader covers" comments Sulaiman, Sharqiyat now prints 1000 copies of every new book, as opposed to the 2000 copies with which it started out.

Dar Sina Lil-Nashr has witnessed a drop in its annual publications. "In 1993 Dar Sina published 34 books, in 1994 we published 20 and in 1995, 18," comments Abdel-Azim. She laments the absence of

district public libraries and would like to see the Ministry of Culture sponsoring a policy of propagating them.

Within this general context of malaise in the book trade the fair, which offers discounts on books, is in the words of Sulaiman, "a rare encounter. It brings together the greatest possible number of people from all sectors of society, regardless of age."

Ibrahim El-Moallim, of Al-Shorouq, the largest private publishing firm in Egypt, and currently head of The Union for Arab Publishers, feels that this is one bonus of the nature of this regional fair.

"Book fairs abroad are a trade event, a professional meeting between publishers, distributors and authors, whereas in the Arab world they are open to the public, embracing two functions."

For Abdel-Azim the fair works as an occasion to touch base with Arab distributors. But to what extent does the event allow publishers to study reading patterns of the general public?

For Al-Shorouq the fair yields valuable information on "the response to particular authors, subjects and to the actual design of books," declares El-Moallim. It is a function that, asserts Abdel-Azim, does not affect Dar Sina Lil-Nashr "given its clear-cut policies and specialisations".

While the priorities of Dar Sharqiyat are non-commercial, literary ones that are thus likewise unlikely to be affected by what sells, Sulaiman doubts whether any such information on reading patterns can be obtained through the fair. "There are no statistics that can be yielded. It is only from public libraries that one can get clues as to whether a particular author is sought. Things happen more by sixth sense," he says.

After the Capital, the book fair moves to Alexandria where the perennial complaint is that what is exhibited there is merely old stock that has not sold in Cairo, whether at the fair or in bookshops, with only a fraction of the foreign titles displayed at the Cairo event figuring on the shelves. But does GEB acknowledge and seek to address this shortcoming?

"On the contrary," says Sarhan, "at times we even include titles that have not been released at the Cairo fair — particularly foreign ones. But of course the Alexandria fair is on a smaller scale. The circle of international participation recedes. Foreign publishers content themselves with the Cairo fair then leave. We take representative samples from foreign and Egyptian publishing houses to Alexandria."

Start them early



Sergei Prokofiev at the age of 10

Children's publishing appears to be in the doldrums. Amira Howeidly talks to some of the participants at this year's book fair to find out why

All those young men and women who chase after you at every book fair insisting that you buy their English language tapes have actually succeeded, over the past few years, in persuading parents that audio visual tapes and cassettes actually will encourage children to read. The 'Muzzy' series for children is to be found in the majority of upper-middle class households. Its success has encouraged many publishing houses to cash in on the market. Dar Al-Shorouq has already launched its own series of English language teaching products, while others look set to launch themselves into this potentially lucrative area. Yet critics who have monitored the new trend warn that shifting to video production will only turn children off books.

Ibrahim El-Moallim, owner of Dar Al-Shorouq, takes issue with such a pessimistic prognosis. The most painless way to teach children a language, he insists, is to provide them with an attractive product that will encourage attentive listening because it is enjoyable. "I don't see how that could affect the children's reading. Learning a language is, after all, totally different from reading a book."

But Sonallah Ibrahim, novelist and author of occasional children's books, argues that for the past ten years video tapes and the other high-tech products aimed at children have

virtually replaced books.

"I haven't monitored any development in children's books published lately, though certainly, in comparison with the seventies and early eighties, when hundreds of titles were produced — both fiction and non-fiction — the picture seems bleak."

Ibrahim relates the downswing to international conditions. Much children's publishing was financed by Arab capital, says Ibrahim. "But this changed after the Gulf War. Both Kuwait and Iraq virtually bankrupted themselves because of the war and one of the casualties of the financial fall-out was the market for children's literature."

Ibrahim also sees elements of the rot that has beset children's literature as being rooted in the open door policy that detrimentally affected children's literature from the mid eighties onwards.

"There was a sort of foreign invasion that afflicted children's publishing houses, and acted to shift everybody's attention to audio-visual products." The main problem, Ibrahim believes, lies in the fact that all the cartoons and high-tech products are either translated or spoken in a foreign language.

"It is a real setback," he says, "that the importance of the Arabic language is being so underestimated."

Hasnaa Megdashi, general manager of Dar Al-Fata Al-Arabi children's publishing house, does



Above: an illustration from the Arabic-English edition of Sergei Prokofiev's *Peter and the Wolf* (US-Mid-East Performing Arts Council 1995). Illustrated by Madeline Toth, it is translated into Arabic by Nazih Girgis who also narrates the story on the accompanying tape

not share Ibrahim's views.

"We should clearly like to break into the audio-visual market, as was stated in our founding policy paper, though unfortunately at the moment we lack the necessary financial backing." And while she would concede that TV and videos have distracted children from pursuing the written word, they can also serve as a medium to attract children back to books.

"In some Western countries, such as Germany, videos and tapes have been used to retrain children to read. There is no reason why that should not happen here."

Megdashi concedes that Arab publishers suffered a great setback after the Gulf War. Both Kuwait and Iraq had furnished large markets for children's publishing. Now those markets have disappeared. The Algerian market, too, has shrunk over the last five years. At the end of the eighties, when the govern-

ment was pursuing a policy of Arabisation, huge orders were placed for books. Now, according to Megdashi, those orders have all but dried up.

El-Moallim, on the other hand, attributes stagnation in the demand for children's titles to other factors. "There are, simply, no writers for children," he said. "Those authors who do attempt to write for the young seem to think that they can get away with simplifying their stories, which is outrageous."

Dar Al-Fata, which has specialised in producing books for young people up to the age of 16, has not launched a new title since 1994. At the book fair they will be promoting a back-list that comprises some 250 titles.

So is there a crisis in children's publishing? The chairman of Dar Al-Shorouq is certainly pessimistic about the prospects for this year's book fair, if only because of the confusion over scheduling. "The dates changed four times. Now it is

opening immediately after the feast, post-Ramadan and post-school vacations. We are not expecting much."

El-Moallim has a right to sound disappointed, since Dar El-Shorouq is entering the book fair with 40 new titles to promote, including a series targeting teenagers.

The 15 Dar Al-Shorouq *Alghar* (Mysteries) are written by Mahmoud Kassar and illustrated by Abdel-Aziz. They have deliberately avoided the heritage based stories with their stress on identity that so often passers literature for this age group. The series, at LE1.50 per volume, is certainly priced so as to be affordable to young buyers, who know they can easily acquire the whole series for no more than LE 20. But will the titles move at this year's book fair. The question persists: how many children will skip school to browse through what is on offer?

28th Cairo International Book Fair: seminar programme

Programme of Main Seminars:

Venue: Qa'at Al-Ma'amarat and Saraya Al-Istithmar

Sat 24 1-3 pm

Theme: *Us vis-a-vis the world: a discussion of Sayed Yassin's 'Al-Wa'ye Al-Tawariki' Wal-Thawra Al-Qawida* (Historical Consciousness and Global Revolution). Participants: Gaber Asfour and 'Alic El-Din Hilal debate the work with the author

3-5 pm

Theme: Communication and mass media in Egypt. Participants: Hamdi Zagzoug, Amin Basyouni, Mohamed El-Gohari and Lutfi El-Kholi

5-7 pm

Open forum with Minister of Culture Farouk Hosni

7-8 pm

Testimonies and experiences: an address by Minister of New Development Communities, Mohamed Ibrahim Sulaiman

8 pm

Poetry reading

Guest of honour: Abdel-Wahab Al-Bayati (Iraq). Participants: Farouk Shousha, Hassan Teli, Mohamed Saleh, Al-Sarnab Abdullah, Walid Munir, Samir Abdel-Baqi and Abdel-Latif Abdel-Hakim

Sun 25 11 am-1 pm

Author and work seminar

Hukouma Madania Am Dina (A Civil or Theocratic State). Author: Abdel-Sattar El-Tawila discusses his book with Abdel-Qadir Shaibah, Antoine Samir and Ahmed Sobhi Mansour

1-3 pm

Theme: Scientific planning for the future. Participants: Heba Handoussa, Anwar Abdel-Malik, Hisham El-Sherif, Mona Makram Ehsaid, Miled Hanna

and Salah Fadi

3-5 pm

Theme: The intelligentsia and the state

Participants: Gaber Asfour, Yassin Serageldin, Abdel-Azim Ramadan, Fathi Chamei, Ahmed Abdel-Moati Hegazi, Khaled Mohieddin, Saadeddin Wahba and Mohamed Enani

5-7 pm

Open forum with Osama El-Baz

7-8 pm

Testimonies and experiences: an address by chairman of the board of Dar Al-Tahrir and editor-in-chief of the voice of the ruling National Democratic Party's *Maya* (May), Samir Ragab

8 pm

Poetry reading

Guest of honour: Mohamed Al-Faitouri (Sudan). Participants: Ahmed Abdel-Moati Hegazi, Ahmed Taimour, Badr Tewfik, Mohamed El-Shahhat, Mohamed Mahran El-Sayed, Nasar Abdullah and Gamal Bekhit

Mon 26 11 am-1 pm

Author and work seminar

Al-Fikr Al-'Arabi Ala Masharifi (Arab Thought on the Threshold of the 21st Century). Author: Mahmoud Amin El-'Alim discusses his book with Foad Zakaria, Murad Wahba, Mohamed El-Sayed Said, Khalil Abdel-Karim, Ibrahim Fathi and Salah Fadi

1-3 pm

Theme: The role played by science in working towards the future

Participants: Samir Hanna, Mohamed El-Gohari, Ahmed Shawki, Sobhi Abdel-Hakim and Mohamed Sharaf

3-5 pm

Theme: Towards a new Arab cultural system

Participants: Sulaiman El-Askari, Emile Habibi, Mohamed El-Laziqi, Samir Al-Qasim, Ghali Shukri, Sayed Yassin, Mohamed Barada, Samir Karim and Gaber Asfour

5-7 pm

Open forum with Minister of Tourism Mamdouh El-Beltagi

7-8 pm

Testimonies and experiences: address by Minister of Economy Nawal El-Tatawi

8 pm

Poetry reading

Guest of honour: Hassan Abdullah Al-Qurashi (Saudi Arabia). Participants: Farouk Gouweida, Ahmed Suweilah, Mohamed Farid Abu

mix, Mahmoud Abdel-Aziz and El-Sayed Elciwa

5-7 pm

Open forum with Minister of Health Ismail Sallam

7-8 pm

Testimonies and experiences: address by Adel Imam

8 pm

Poetry reading

Guest of honour: Saadi Youssef (Iraq). Participants: Abdel-Rahman

tion Hussein Kiamal Bahaddin

7-8 pm

Testimonies and experiences: address by Amr Mansour

8 pm

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Guest of honour: Samir Al-Qasim (Palestine). Participants: Mohamed El-Tubani, Ibrahim Issa, Ramadan Abdel-Azim, Ismail 'Aqab, Abdel-Qadir Hameida, Ismail Bakri and Maged Youssef

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Al-Ahram: A Diwan of contemporary life

Gerard de Nerval, the French explorer, visited Egypt in 1848. His memoirs of this voyage are recorded in his *Visit to the East*, published in Paris in 1869 over 20 years later.

One portion of his book is devoted to Egyptian wedding ceremonies. His account does not vary greatly from that of M. de Chabrol, one of the scholars attached to the French expedition, in his *Description d'Egypte* which had appeared 50 years previously.

De Nerval describes the ritual, in which the bride is taken to the bath-house by her friends. He then describes the traditional wedding procession: a train of dancers, musicians and singers, then torch bearers, a cortege of slaves escorting the bride, the bridesmaids and other women. The women would wear long gowns, and the bride, a gown of cashmere. The procession would proceed slowly and with great pomp, as "the guests drank a curious, sweet, red-coloured drink", by which de Nerval meant the famous Egyptian *sherbet*.

Fifty years later, at the end of the 19th century, the wedding rituals had changed. This time, however, it was not a European traveller who described them. Rather, it was *Al-Ahram*, and not in a single chapter, but in successive images diffused over many issues of the newspaper. Together, they comprise a vivid portrait of one of the most important aspects of Egyptian social life in that epoch.

The enormous influx of foreigners during this period, particularly Europeans from the north of the Mediterranean basin and Lebanese and Syrians to the east, would have the greatest impact on the nuptial ceremony. The relative affluence of these communities would naturally inspire a degree of emulation, at least among the newly rising social classes in the country. These were notably the agrarian aristocracy of largely Turkish origin as well as the growing *effendi* class of government officials who had moved up through an educational system geared to produce the cadres for a large and modern administration.

Also to have a great impact on social customs, were the developments in communication technology that would open Egyptian society to the west. The national press — via the Reuters and Havas wire services — played a fundamental role in transmitting aspects of European culture. The fact that *Al-Ahram* was based in Alexandria, a port city with its finger on the pulse of the Mediterranean world, bordering the Mediterranean, and that the newspaper had a permanent representative in Cairo to cover the political and social developments in the capital, combine to make it the most articulate mouthpiece of a changing society. Wedding customs were one manifestation of that change.

One of the few times that *Al-Ahram* featured a foreign wedding was on the occasion of the marriage of the daughter of one of Alexandria's most prominent foreign families. On 30 December, 1893, at 3pm on Nabi Daniel Street, "Celine de Menache was betrothed to the honourable Baron Felix de Menache, before a large audience of foreign and Egyptian dignitaries," reports

Al-Ahram.

It was foreigners who introduced the custom of conducting the wedding ceremony in a place of worship, in this case in a church. Afterwards they would hold a reception at home, as the remainder of the above news item tells us: "At 4pm, the Baroness de Menache hosted a reception in her home situated on Bab Shargi Street, in which she entertained, in refined elegance and comfort, a large crowd of well-wishers of every class and race."

Even here, it is interesting to note, intermarriage among kin was as prevalent as it was among Egyptians. The reasons, however, were probably different. The foreign communities were much smaller, limiting the available choices within the same ethnic or religious community. It would have been, of course, quite out of the ordinary to marry outside of such affiliations.

Given the Levantine origins of the newspaper's founders, it is not surprising to find numerous items covering the nuptials of members of the Syrian and Lebanese communities in Egypt. Here we offer three from around the country.

The first is from the Nile Delta city of Tanta, announcing: "The wedding celebrations of Mademoiselle Leone de Bouton to the distinguished scholar, Monsieur Jacques Helou, to which a great number of dignitaries and nobles are invited, will take place this evening in the home of M. Joseph Helou the father of the groom. We wish them happiness and prosperity."

From Alexandria, on 5 December 1899, *Al-Ahram* gives special coverage to the marriage of one of its own: "The eminent Bichara Tagla, the editor-in-chief of *Al-Ahram* in Alexandria to Betsy Kobaya, the daughter of the late Nassef Allah Kobaya." The newspaper continues: "The ceremonies, which took place in St. Nicolas de Mer Roman Catholic Church, were conducted by Father El-Khouiri Phillips Abdouh, the patriarchal representative. Among those present were numerous notables from Marseilles who have come to Alexandria to attend the ceremonies, demonstrating the high esteem the groom has in their hearts." The bride's family hailed from Marseilles and it appeared that Bichara Tagla had met her during one of his European tours. One assumes that the wedding celebrations were similar to those held in France.

The third item, from Cairo, has a more official ring. The wedding of "His Excellency, Constantin Bey Quta, secretary of the council of ministers, to Her Ladyship Brahamsia", was celebrated in all the pomp and ceremony that surrounds high office. Guests included "their excellencies, the ministers and deputy ministers, the venerable Sheikh Hassouna El-Nawawi and senior officials, dignitaries and notables of every nationality." Ceremonies took place "in a luxurious pavilion, where spectators could view the noble marital couple" and prayers were led by "His eminence Bishop Al-Matran Athanasios Naser who had travelled from Alexandria especially for this occasion." A lavish buffet, "inaugurated by their excellencies, the ministers and then sampled by the other guests," was followed

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The rites and rituals of Egyptian weddings underwent great changes in the 19th century. With an

influx of foreigners setting the pace, the festivities changed, particularly among two new social classes — the agrarian aristocracy and the *effendi* class of government officials and other white-collar employees. In this instalment of his glimpses of Egyptian life through the eyes of *Al-Ahram*, Dr Yunan Labib Rizq reviews in vivid detail how marriages were celebrated. He describes an exceptional case — the nuptials of a reigning khedive, whose spouse gave birth to his first child one week before the wedding



by "the illustrious bird of verse and song, Sheikh Youssef El-Manilawi, who delighted the ear and moved the heart with pearls of his music."

Naturally, marriages in the royal family would occasion far more expensive journalistic fanfare. In the case of the marriage of the Khedive Abbas Helmy in 1895, however, *Al-Ahram* was obliged to be a little reserved. It was 40 years later that the reason for this reserve was revealed in the memoirs of palace confidant, Ahmed Shaqqa Pasha.

In December 1894, a foster daughter in the royal court, Iqbal Hanem Effendi, could no longer conceal the signs of her pregnancy. Iqbal was one of the three maids who served the khedive, who was reputed to be "infatuated by her extraordinary beauty and charm." At this time, Abbas's mother was trying to arrange a marriage for her son to a daughter of the sultan in Istanbul. Happily for Abbas, her endeavours failed, for he had his mind set on marrying Iqbal. The wedding indeed took place — one week after the arrival of the khedive's newborn daughter.

We note, therefore, that *Al-Ahram* seemed deliberately vague regarding the ceremonial details, although it spared little in the way of exultation. "No greater joy, comfort and rapture could transport our hearts than the bliss felt by the entire nation at the marriage of His Royal Highness, who today took Iqbal Hanem Effendi, the delight of his life, as his lawful wedded wife." On the other hand, the newspaper was not so sparing in describing the details of the marriage of the khedive's sister, Khadija,

which took place only a few weeks before his own. The canons thundered as the royal wedding procession passed through the gates of Abdin Palace. A cortege of police and military units, then the royal guards, swords drawn, were followed by "a large gilded carriage, resplendent with glowing lanterns, covered with the finest silks." In the wake of this carriage, "drawn by six noble steeds," followed "numerous other carriages carrying the other princesses." The wedding feast was held in Qubba Palace. "The illustrious male guests took their evening repast at tables filled with a sumptuous array of food, while the female guests enjoyed similar fare in another quarter of the palace."

We note a similar style and opulence in the weddings of other members of the ruling Turkish aristocracy. On 23 February 1895 *Al-Ahram* announces the wedding of "the daughter of Mustafa Pasha Sadiq to Mahmoud Bek Masoud, the son of Masoud Pasha." Here too the wedding cortege consisted of "a gilded carriage, escorted by a military band and a cavalry contingent."

The landed gentry and the *effendi* class, both of which had emerged only in the late 19th century, were also the most affected in terms of changing customs and traditions. Of particular interest is an *Al-Ahram* article, published by "an Egyptian man of letters", in which he subjects many wedding customs and traditions to criticism. But he was grateful that "the custom of collecting wedding gifts for the bride has come to an end." But, he complains: "When a woman is invited to a wedding, she will only attend in the company of her servant, her children,

her children's nurse, her neighbour and whoever else may be in residence with her at the moment, so that the home of the wedding celebration becomes intolerably crowded," he complained.

We also note that the rural dignitaries were quick to emulate their urban counterparts, and the news of their wedding celebrations also had a place in *Al-Ahram*. In April 1895, the mayor of Zagazig, Ibrahim Effendi Emara, "hosted a festive evening to which were invited the justices of the court, the chiefs of government departments and the village notables. The most prominent guest was the chief superintendent of the Sharqiyya Directorate. The feast, celebrating the marriage of the Mayor's two daughters to Ibrahim Effendi Muwafi and Mahmoud El-Sayid Emara, featured an enticing array of the most delectable foods and a sumptuous variety of luscious sweets."

Also from Zagazig, we read of the wedding of the daughter of a prominent merchant and one of the village dignitaries. This celebration gives us occasion to observe that weddings in the countryside were also events for important rural families to meet and solidify relationships. Here the well-known Abaza family were listed as prominent guests. One notes here as well, that while the guests feasted, "victuals and meat were distributed to the poor." Finally, entertainment featured "the unique and original singer, Mohamed Effendi Othman, and the illustrious songstress, the Hajia El-Suwayda, who enchanted their audience until well after midnight."

Occasionally, from the countryside one comes across reports of amusing incidents, or "curious anecdotes" as *Al-Ahram* puts it. A dignitary from Al-Dahliyat, went to Alexandria to seek a wife for his son. When the bride-to-be was brought to the village, the father of the groom was so taken by her, that "he felt a sudden surge of youth, stopped the proceedings and summoned the village sheikh to marry him to his son's bride, leaving the despondent son to mourn the unethical behaviour of his father."

As for the *effendis* in the cities, the following wedding announcement is of particular interest. "Moussa Effendi Abdel-Rahim, the engineer and public surveyor celebrated his marriage to one of the freed slaves of Her Royal Highness, the mother of His Royal Highness the Khedive." It was not uncommon for the rising Egyptian class of government bureaucrats to seek access to the ruling Turkish aristocracy through marriages of this nature.

A large proportion of the new *effendi* class were Copts, whose weddings were frequently reported in *Al-Ahram*. We have, by way of example, "the marriage of the daughter of the Chief Clerk of the Mahmoudiyya Canal Agency to the young scholar Abdel-Malek Effendi Kamel, the son of the director of health revenues." It goes on to report: "The wedding, which was attended by a large throng of friends and family, was conducted by Arch-priest Demetrios, deputy justice of Coptic canon law, after which the guests congratulated the newly married couple."

One notes that the weddings among the

effendi classes, given their more limited means, lack the extravagance that characterised the weddings among the Turkish aristocracy and the Egyptian upper classes. There is one notable exception: the marriage, in February 1896, of the nationalist leader Saad Zaghloul. Only 37 at the time, Saad Zaghloul had already made a mark in history. He was closely associated with the political and spiritual reformer Mohamed Abdu and he was a successful lawyer who had recently been appointed as a deputy justice in the court of appeals. With the proceeds from his successful legal practice, he was able to afford to buy sufficient property to elevate himself to the stature of the landed gentry and he was also a frequent guest at the salon of Princess Nazli Fadel, thus socialising with members of the ruling Turkish aristocracy. In fact it was the princess who commended Saad Zaghloul to Prime Minister Mustafa Fahmi Pasha for marriage to his daughter. That Mustafa Fahmi accepted the proposal of marriage into his family from the son of a remote village mayor was an extraordinary concession for a member of that class at that time, as well as a high token of esteem for the prepossessing character of Saad Zaghloul. But then, Saad would have to pay the cost for the festivities commensurate with the class into which he was marrying. "The grandest ceremony we have seen this year," was how *Al-Ahram* described the marriage. Consider the pavilion, "capacious enough to hold thousands of guests, with rows of crystal chandeliers hanging from the ceiling and gilded furniture upholstered with red silk." Then consider the guests, with "their excellencies the ministers, the chief justice, the royal master of ceremonies, senior government officials, members of the Legislative Council" heading a long list of "prominent dignitaries and notables." Then the entertainment, for which was provided an orchestra to play military music, and then, not one, but three of the most prominent singers of the time — Abdu El-Hamouli, Yussef El-Manialawi and Mohamed El-Aqqad with his famous musical troupe. Last but not least, the food. At 1pm, the newspaper reports, "in another spacious pavilion, the sumptuous banquet tables were laden with foods prepared in the European fashion." The guests streamed in to eat to surfeit, "testifying to the munificent hospitality of the host. May we pray that God make this wedding the gateway to happiness for Saad and his gracious betrothed."

Curiously, the news report makes no mention of the name of the bride. Perhaps that is because everyone knew that it was Sufiya Zaghloul, the prime minister's daughter, who would later be known as Sufiya Zaghloul, the only woman to receive the epithet, "the mother of the Egyptian people."

The author is a professor of history and head of Al-Ahram History Studies Centre.

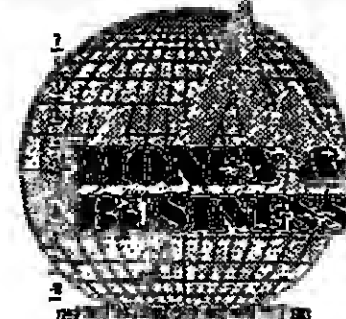


Franchise exhibition in Cairo

FOR THE first time in Egypt, Network Limited, a consulting firm in the field of managerial and marketing development, will introduce the well-known concept of franchising.

Network Limited is just one of the participants in the Investment Opportunities and Franchise Exhibition in Cairo. The event will be the meeting place of numerous international and local companies willing to expand in the Egyptian market and will provide participants with the opportunity to establish further business relations.

MONEY & BUSINESS



Natural disasters burdens

DAMAGES from natural disasters reached US\$180bn in 1995, an increase from the \$118bn reached in the previous year. On the other hand, claims paid in 1995 by insurance companies in the wake of such disasters reached \$14bn, a mere 8 per cent of total damages.

Mohamed El-Tir, head of the Egyptian Company for Re-Insurance and the International Federation of Insurance and Re-Insurance Companies in Developing Nations, explained that because insurance remains in limited use, the burden of compensation falls upon the government.

NBE boosting the stock exchange investment instruments

STOCK EXCHANGES in general stand for one of the most vital markets that mobilise and channel financial resources from over-savings economic units to other units suffering from deficient resources. The Egyptian Stock Exchange has recently gained special momentum in the light of the privatisation policy and the trend towards expanding ownership base, as it is envisaged to be a major source of financing for the purchase of projects scheduled for privatisation.

The National Bank of Egypt (NBE) vast and long experience, being the most eminent financial institution in Egypt, has rendered it capable of playing a catalytic role in enhancing the Egyptian

Stock Exchange via its Securities Department. This specialised department, equipped with the most sophisticated data and information analysis techniques, has become an insider within the market and a provider of sound consultative services in respect to evaluating the privatised companies as well as managing the customers' portfolios with a view to maximising the returns thereof.

To this end, the bank prepares comprehensive studies and financial and economic analyses that take into consideration all exogenous and endogenous elements affecting the evaluation process. Moreover, these studies represent the

bank's ability to guide in financing the purchase of the privatised enterprises.

Furthermore, NBE has innovated new activities providing for creating a spontaneous capital inflow from abroad via sub-custodian agreements with correspondent banks, where the bank hedges, customers willing to invest in securities in the Egyptian Stock Exchange, against equity ownership to the customer. This is besides keeping securities in guaranteed safes together with effecting all financial settlements related to collecting coupons, selling shares and transferring amounts thereof to the customers' accounts. In addition, the bank provides its customers with all financial

consultations as well as in-depth reports on the stock exchange

In a further attempt to re-activate the stock exchange, NBE has established various companies to deal in brokerage, marketing and covering subscriptions, forming and managing portfolios, venture capital in addition to managing mutual funds.

It is worth mentioning that NBE was the first bank to introduce the first mutual fund in Egypt in line with its orientation towards innovating new mechanisms for mobilising savings. The success of NBE's first mutual fund — yielding accumulated return — encouraged the bank to establish its second fund — yielding

periodic return — thus, meeting the various desires of different investors.

As the disclosure of data and information is regarded as an essential element for the sound performance of the stock exchange and also a vital element for dealers therein, NBE has embarked on covering the market's variables through two periodical reports; a weekly including analyses of the most negotiable companies in the stock exchange in terms of the number of weekly transactions and a monthly report covering the progress of the market in respect of the number of negotiable shares together with the causes of price movements within the market.

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17 Al-Falouja St., off Abdel Moneim
Riyadh St., Agouza
Tel: 3027513-3027514
• Alexandria Branch
7 Victoria Basil St., Azaria, Alexandria
Tel: 4838618-4838490
• Damanhour Branch
Al Sheikh Mohamed Abdel Karim St.,
Damanhour Tel: 335888-331888

• Tanta Branch
Aziz Fahmy Sq., Al-Awkal Building,
Tanta Tel: 334194-334953
• Benha Branch
Al-Bahr St., Benha
Tel: 27861-27862
• Mansoura Branch
17 Al-Harb St., Mansoura
Tel: 339965 / 338794
• Mahala Branch
Al Awkal building - Al Geish St., Mahala
Tel: 331704-331708-337708
• Suez Branch
Port Said St., Suez Tel: 222834-222631
• Assiut Branch
Al Awkal Building No 1 - Tenth of
Ramadan Project Assiut
Tel: 323739-326006
• Sohag Branch
Baga St., Sohag
Tel: 324792-324795

The American University in Cairo offers the IAA diploma

THE AMERICAN University in Cairo (AUC) has been accredited to offer the strongest professional diploma in marketing and advertising around the world: the International Advertising Association (IAA) diploma. Founded in 1938, the IAA is considered, today, the largest forum for advertisers and marketers with membership and representation in 38 countries. The courses offered in this diploma are highly needed in today's competitive markets and economies. Due to the pressing demand of companies and agencies for qualified staff capable of marketing, selling and promoting products and services more effectively, the IAA has designed the strongest professional diploma in marketing and advertising. Subjects like understanding consumer behaviour, marketing research, publicity, professional internal and external public relations, issues management, desktop publishing, computer imaging

and graphics are among the selective topics offered in this diploma. Such a diploma is not offered anywhere in the Middle East except at the American University in Cairo. After passing tough procedures, the IAA has approved AUC as the only accredited institution to offer its highly demanded and advanced professional diploma. To ensure the quality of its diploma, the IAA requires instructors to be not only academically capable of teaching in English, but also to have in-depth practical experience. Therefore AUC was granted the accreditation. Among the benefits of the IAA diploma, graduates will be in continuous contact with an international network of professionals in marketing and advertising where up-to-date information is exchanged. Moreover, a lot of help and support is provided from companies which are members of the IAA chapter in Egypt and the Middle East.

Projects worth LE7mn in Alexandria free zone

TEN APPLICATIONS for launching new projects will be submitted during the forthcoming council meeting which will be headed by Ismail El-Gawaski, governor of Alexandria. These projects will cost LE7mn, of which LE3.5mn is in owned capital. Mamdouh Salema, chairman of the Alexandria free zone, stated that these projects will be built on 10,000 sq. m. and will provide 150 job opportunities. They include: — An Egyptian venture operating in the field of electrical appliance assembly, the capital of this project amounts to US\$250,000, with an investment cost of \$250,000. The project will provide 20 job opportunities. — A Libyan project to store building materials and construction equipment, as well as chemical materials. The capital of this project amounts to \$150,000, with investment costs of \$150,000. This project will provide 10 job opportunities. — A paper storage project with investment costs of \$210,000 which is in owned capital. The project will provide 10 job opportunities. — An Egyptian venture to store metal production requirements. The capital of the project is estimated at \$300,000 and will provide 10 job opportunities. — An Egyptian computer cell storage venture with investment costs of \$600,000. The project will provide 7 job opportunities. — An Egyptian venture to store electronic equipment and electrical components. The capital is estimated at \$500,000, with investment costs of \$1mn. This project will provide 10 job opportunities.

Tell people in the city



A documentary film featuring women's struggle for representation in public and political life is to be released this March. Gihan Shahine is already glued to the screen

Sayed Darwish's "Hiz Al-Hilal Ya Sayed" was sung for the women who demonstrated in support of Saad Zaghloul in 1919, and for Shafiq Mohamed, killed during the demonstration. *Days of Democracy* opens with this song. A tragicomic documentary, it records the most significant moments in women candidates' campaigns for the 1995 People's Assembly elections. It is dedicated to women like Shafiq Mohamed, Nemaat Hassan (a Labour Party candidate shot in the 1984 elections), the two candidates killed in Kafr Al-Sheikh during the last elections... Then the final results of the elections are run, without a comment: out of 89 female candidates (seven running on the National Democratic Party ticket, three from the Wafd, one from Tagammu, three from the Liberal party, one from the Arab Egypt Party, three from the Labour Party, and 71 independent), only five — from the NDP — made it into parliament. The contrast is ironic, and sets the tone for things to come.

"The idea of the film came to my mind in 1994 while attending a conference held at the Ibn Khaldun Centre for Development Studies to discuss women's participation in public life in general and in politics in particular," says Attiyah El-Ahmedy, director and producer of *Days of Democracy*. "I believe that women's representation in the People's Assembly is crucial in terms of their participation in public life and politics. And so I thought of documenting women's attempts, dreams, theories and the hardships they underwent in the latest elections. The film can serve as a reference for further academic studies concerning women's skill in delivering speeches, women's theories about politics and the effect of the social environment on female candidates. It mainly focuses on women's election campaigns, their plans for reform, and on people's response to their campaigns."

El-Ahmedy hunted down all the women candidates in the 1995 elections, covering some 8,000 kilometres in search of her interviews, from Upper Egypt to Alexandria.

"Usually, directors of documentary films must study the locations and the personalities to be interviewed beforehand," she comments. "So I had to start my research in September, two months before the beginning of elections." Tracking down the candidates was almost impossible, however: the media devoted almost no space to women candidates. El-Ahmedy had feared that independents would be the most difficult candidates to contact directly, but soon discovered that even the women running on party tickets were more or less unavailable beyond a name on a list in their respective constituencies: no address, no phone numbers. "One party newspaper's correspondent in Mallowi did not even have any information about the party's candidate in the same governorate," El-Ahmedy exclaims.

She had to depend mainly on personal contacts, "at least to make sure that the candidates were officially nominated and were definitely running in the elections. I practically had to shoot between 8 November, when all the candidates' names were officially announced, and the 27th of the same month,

the day before the elections. That means I was pressed to finish all the shooting in 20 days, spending about a day in every governorate from Aswan in the south to Kafr Al-Sheikh and Alexandria in the north. In this short period I could only interview 45 candidates, around 50 per cent of the total number, and I also managed to speak with a lot of voters."

Despite the marathon pace, El-Ahmedy tremendously enjoyed making the film — living every moment to the full, recording every word. The pressure of time added to the feeling that a historic moment was being imprinted on film. "I had the unique opportunity of witnessing Egypt in a vivid spirit of patriotism, to see people obsessed with a dream of changing to the better, of eliminating misery and actually devoting their whole lives to the realisation of these dreams. But that was nothing compared to the love and support voters showed their candidates."

Many moments came as a surprise; for instance, the stereotype that rural society tends to disregard and downgrade women is not immediately evident in voters' reactions. "Most of the voters were men who, as they themselves put it, follow whoever is capable of serving their neighbourhood, and assume that women candidates are as capable as their male counterparts," El-Ahmedy asserts. Many men even preferred the women candidates, citing their conviction that women usually dedicate their time to helping people, and are always ready to listen and suggest solutions.

El-Ahmedy's documentaries usually convey a clear message: *Days of Democracy* is no exception.

Most of the candidates, the director believes, regardless of upbringing, education and way of thinking, are highly respectable national and political leaders who need guidance and support far beyond that provided in conferences and seminars. A section entitled "Tell Suzanne Mubarak" addresses political figures involved in women's rights activism, exhorting them to forget their round-table discussions in five-star hotels, to set aside reports and figures and come down to earth, meet the women rooted firmly in their surroundings and experience the problems people face every day.

"All the women I met had the sense they could really make it. They were disappointed, of course, when their posters were ripped off the wall, when male candidates slandered them, and when, finally, they lost."

Nefisa can barely read, but she has served on local councils since 1979. Her five sons are all highly educated; she worked in the village health office after her husband's death to put them through university.

"Nefisa is the most important symbol in my film," says El-Ahmedy. "Her very organised conversation and unique Sa'idi dialect, her ambition, the confidence and persistence obvious in her features, her awareness of what her people need most and the great love they have for her, all these prove clearly that while some women may not be highly educated and may even grow up in very underdeveloped surroundings, they can best represent their people and are fully capable of serving their country. That is what people in the city need to know."



Despite the pace, El-Ahmedy enjoyed doing the film tremendously, living every moment with the women



All for a wedding dress

My friend Ola is upset: Another Eid is upon us and her daughter Nazi is still not talking of getting married. "I am starting to panic," admits Ola. "What have I done wrong?" Ola's mother claims that Nazi has been over-educated and not taught enough respect for her brother. Consequently she cannot see the advantages a man brings to a woman's life.

"What advantages?" asks Ola's friend, Samia aggressively. "Protection..." ventures Ola after a minute of reflection. "The only protection a woman needs is from marriage, says Samia who has just deserted the nest after 25 years of a rocky marriage. The rumour has it that the husband has recently taken up running around with teenagers. With two grown sons, Samia had felt suddenly redundant. She went back to her interrupted career and moved out with a minimum of fuss. "I am one of the lucky ones," she often tells her friends. "I had a place to go to."

Ola is not listening to Samia. She is imagining Nazi on her wedding day. The dress will have to come from Paris. She visualises the zaffa on the steps of her favourite five-star hotel. Nazi should ask for a large diamond, she is thinking. It will look sweet on her hand.

Meanwhile, Samia is haranguing an invisible public about the evils of marriage. "A demanding husband, a couple of cesspools, confinement at home for over ten years doing homework and a hysterectomy to top it all, this is what my friend Ola wishes upon her daughter and she won't have peace until she starts the ball rolling!"

The two women are bitterly arguing now, the first holding up for the possibilities of a happy union, the other for the chances of disaster. They make lists of happy and unhappy couples, the balance here is in favour of Samia. Ola has only come up with three couples of her acquaintance who qualify. Furthermore, in every one of these cases, it is the woman who is keeping things together.

Samia emerges triumphant but Ola is insisting: "What else could Nazi do with the rest of her life if — perish the thought — she would not get married?" She soon regrets the question: Samia's suggestions would make a decent PhD dissertation. Besides she has set her on the warpath. "Men are useless," she says emphatically. "Few earn a living and even fewer earn enough to support a family. But have their demands decreased proportionally? Not on your life! The less they give, the more they demand. They also need reassurance. The poor women after a day's hard work have to sit with their husbands and boost their ego, tell them they are the most important thing in their lives. 'I am nothing without you' is the least expression of devotion expected by a husband who has spent the day at the cafe while his wife was working."

Suddenly Samia remembers Ola: "It is conservative women like you, like my mother, who are attached to the frivolities of marriage, the big wedding, the imported wedding dress, the apartment in Mohandessin — that you are dying to decorate yourself — and the Linage tea set, who are responsible for women's miseries. If that all you want for your daughter?"

Samia is almost screaming now, "How about her own life? her talents, her independence, her self confidence, her freedom? Don't these count?" Samia has fought for her divorce and now for the first time in her life she is enjoying being her own boss. Her sons are grown. She has lavished on them all the love and attention they needed and more. Now she can have facials, visit the hairdresser, go to exercise classes, to the movies, to the opera, all without feeling guilty. She loves the feeling. How did she survive all these years, she often wonders. What a pity she discovered all this so late. "I don't want Nazi to feel regrets when she is my age," she tells Ola apologetically. This is why I get so quarrelsome at the mention of wedding preparations."

Samia is about to leave. She forgot something, the reason why she came to visit Ola in the first place. From her elegant handbag, she extracts a gold and cream envelope. Her son Khaled is getting married on the first Thursday of the Eid. A very big wedding in a five star hotel with 600 guests and a zaffa never witnessed before. "Did the bride buy the wedding dress in Paris?" asks Ola ironically. "New York," says Samia briefly the impromptu lost on her. "I must run to check on their apartment. I left the carpenter there." Is the apartment in Mohandessin? asks Ola following her to the elevator. "How do you know?" The door of the elevator closes on Samia's surprised smile.

Fayza Hassan

When less is best

Is hunger healthy? In recent decades, many medical practitioners have devoted themselves to investigating the relation between medicine and food, on the one hand, and between fasting and curing certain diseases, on the other.

A study conducted by Dr Nasreddin Siam, professor of anaesthesiology at Al-Azhar's Faculty of Medicine, emphasised the great benefits of fasting, which, according to him, helps the body's cells and tissues to regenerate.

"The heart muscle relaxes during fasting, and the pulse slows from 75 to 60 beats per minute. This saves 21,600 beats every 24 hours," says Siam.

Ramadan also provides a good opportunity for dental hygiene. Dentists usually advise their patients — except in some cases — to take advantage of the holy month to repair damaged teeth.

"There are seven main kinds of microbes which normally live inside the mouth, feeding on food remnants," says Dr Imam Abu Sina, professor of dentistry at Cairo University. "Each gramme of remains contains 4-5 million microbes. Through fasting, in addition to other clinical means, those microbes are denied their main means of survival."

In addition, adds Abu Sina, fasting strengthens the immune system, allowing the body to fight against microbes.

Egyptian researchers like Siam and Abu Sina have been further encouraged by studies conducted in other parts of the world and which indicate links

between food consumption and aging.

Japanese scientists who have been studying the healthy benefits of hunger for 20 years now suggest that the immune systems of animals which were fed less were not damaged at the usual rate. In addition, some diseases which usually accompany aging, such as cancer, heart diseases and kidney failure, appeared at later stages.

In Europe and the US, specialised clinics have been established where patients undergo a regimen known as medical fasting — which, incidentally, has no relation to fasting for religious reasons.

Medical fasting, which should only be undertaken under the strict supervision of a specialised doctor, is used to treat a variety of diseases and to assist in

weight loss.

According to the fasting regime, patients may fast for two days, a week or three weeks, according to their health condition. Only water is allowed during this time. Water purifies the body of poisons and helps overcome hunger pangs.

Patients return to a normal diet gradually, over a number of days equal to the days they have fasted.

Medical fasting is nothing new. In the nineteenth century, it was thought to cure asthma, arthritis and epilepsy. Specialised clinics were established in Germany, Switzerland, France, India, Japan and Russia.

Muslims may benefit from the gradual approach used in returning to solid food by those who fast for

EVER since humans sketched the first bison, fasting was the counterpart of feasting. Both Moses and Jesus fasted 40 days following revelation, while the Bible includes 74 mentions of fasting. Ancient Egyptians believed in the health benefits of fasting three days out of every month.

Ancient Greeks fasted to purify their bodies and sharpen their intellects. Pythagoras fasted 40 days and advised his students to follow his example; both Socrates and Plato went on ten-day fasting sprees.

For Christians, Wednesdays, Fridays and Saturdays were once devoted to fasting. Fasting was also believed to deter disasters and to indicate atonement.

Ibn Sina (Avicenna) prescribed fasting to cure certain chronic diseases. During the tenth and eleventh centuries, Arab doctors prescribed fasting for three weeks as a cure for smallpox.

For one month every year, Muslims fast from dawn to sunset. But fasting is also recommended by some doctors as a medical treatment all year round, writes Amira Ibrahim

Supra Dayma

Sharkassey

Ingredients:

1 chicken (cut in 4 parts)
one large onion (chopped)
2 cups tomato juice (fresh)
1/4 kilo walnuts
1/4 kilo chicken liver (cooked)
The inside of 2 french loaves
4/6 cups of chicken stock
1/2 tsp. crushed garlic
A pinch of dry coriander
Salt +pepper+mustard+cardamom

Method:

Fry the onion until golden then pour over the tomato juice. When it boils, put the chicken parts and season. Lower the heat and simmer until chicken is cooked. Remove from its stock and leave aside, covered. Pour the stock into a strainer to clear it from all residue and set aside in a cooking pan. Take some of the stock and soak the inside of the loaves in it for a quarter of an hour. In an electric blender, blend together the chicken liver, the walnuts and the soaked bread (add more stock if needed to moisten the mixture). Bring back the chicken stock to the heat, stirring in it the thick mixture. Add the garlic and coriander, and bring to boil while stirring. Season to taste and keep it hot. To serve put the chicken parts in a serving dish, then pour the thick sauce on top. Serve with white rice and a green salad.

Moushira Abdel-Malek

Restaurant review

Early one morning

Nigel Ryan discovers that early risers get more than worms

Outside Maison Thomas, in Zamalek, there sits a sandwich board. Somehow it seems appropriate, given that the bulk of Maison Thomas' business is in sandwiches. But beneath the printed list of available sandwiches, which reads more like a travel brochure than a menu since they are all called Capri, or Venezia, or some other Mediterranean hot spot, there is a discretely written notice announcing breakfast. Now that Ramadan is over, and breakfast has become a morning activity once again, it was to Maison Thomas I ventured, to test the contents of that discretely written notice.

Now the first thing that strikes one on entering the premises of Maison Thomas is that this is an establishment suffering an identity crisis. It cannot quite make up its mind. Is it a delicatessen, a cafe, or a take away? The truth is that it cannot, just cannot, make up its mind. It wants the best of all possible worlds. And so, at one end of the rectangular space is a cheese cabinet, next to it a cold counter full of cooked and cured meats. But by far the greatest amount of floor space is filled with tables and stools, at which very few people sit. And the majority of people sitting tend to be waiting to take away sandwiches, pizzas or whatever.

The interior itself is a stylish affair. The tables and stools are matte black metal, hardly very comfortable though with nice lines. The lighting is frosted glass and chrome, the walls supplied, the floor boards stripped. There is a well-intentioned attempt to add a touch of greenery, with large palms in earthenware pots, but the large palms do not appear to thrive, and as a consequence the attempt to add

a bit of spring to the atmosphere becomes elegiac. There is a touch of autumn in the air. There are, too, the naff touches. A row of straw covered Chianti bottles declares another aspect of the identity crisis, since Maison Thomas, though it includes off-hicence as a split in its personality, does not sell Italian wine.

Enough of atmospherics and onto the food. The menu promised orange juice, coffee, bacon or a selection of cheeses, two eggs, bread, croissant and jam. And all for LE14.55, which seems something of a bargain. So I perched on a stylish though far from comfortable stool and ordered. For ten minutes there was a flurry of activity behind the counter, after which everything promised on the sandwich board had arrived, bar the coffee. I was asked whether I wanted Nescafe or black. I asked for black, assuming that it would not be Nescafe. And indeed, it turned out to be reasonable, filtered coffee served with a jug of milk so it need not even be black.

The bacon and fried eggs were accompanied by several slices of Gouda. I presume that if you forego the bacon you get a slightly wider selection of cheeses which is a good thing since there is a limit to how much Gouda even a Dutchman can eat. The croissant was fine, though the jam, predictably enough, came in those mean, plastic portion control containers. There was nothing mean about the bacon.

Efficient, sensible service, sensibly priced. What more can you ask from breakfast?

Maison Thomas, 157, 26 July St, Zamalek Tel 340 7057

Al-Ahram Weekly

Crossword

By Samia Abdelnour

ACROSS

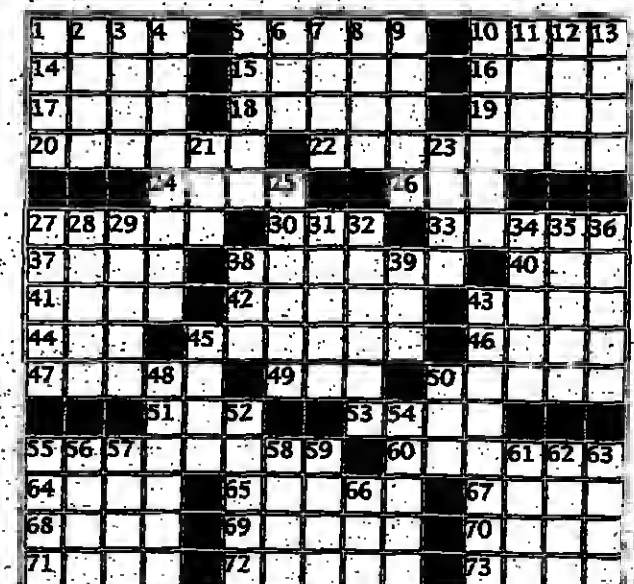
1. Earth; stupid person (4)
5. Rich sponge cake soaked in syrup, pl. (5)
10. Work (4)
14. Knowledge (4)
15. Act emotionally (5)
16. Excellent, 2 wds (4)
17. Eve's mate (4)
18. Cards used for fortune telling (5)
19. Russian emperor (4)
20. Inundation (6)
22. Pitty maxim (8)
24. Rattling sound in lungs (4)
26. Born (3)
27. Honourable flame; resplendent beauty or magnificence (5)
30. At present (3)
33. Heap up (5)
37. Laugh, fr. (4)
38. Succor (6)
40. Bunk (3)
41. Betwixt (4)

DOWN

1. Dressed (4)
2. Vein of metal ore (4)
3. Verbal (4)
4. Protested (8)
5. Leaf chewed in the East with areca-nut (5)
6. US doctors' group, abb. (3)
7. Rite of admission to manhood among Aborigines (4)
8. Above (4)
9. Determined to get, 2 wds. (5)
10. Distinguishing mark; capsule (5)

DOWN

42. Constructed (5)
43. Withered (4)
44. Ogle (3)
45. Positively (6)
46. Vivacity (4)
47. Structure marking path for aircraft (5)
49. Poetic for "before" (3)
50. Forbids (5)
51. Expressing asseveration (3)
53. Latent-rigged Arabian Sea ship (4)
54. Ascribe; approve (8)
60. Glorifies (6)
64. Poetic for "valley" (4)
65. Utopian (5)
67. Shredded (4)
68. Moon goddess (4)
69. Have rights to (5)
70. Plans (4)
71. Gives lightly (4)
72. Dives detailed account (5)
73. Oboe for one (4)



11. Exude (4)
12. Hindrance, setback (4)
13. Period of mourning (4)
21. Jovial (3)
23. Critical examination (4)
25. Make certain (6)
27. Clutch (5)
28. British sailor or ship, sl. (5)
29. Multicoloured window supported on corbels (5)
31. Species of willow used in basket-work (5)
32. Requested by testament (6)
34. Reference marks (5)
35. Raced again (5)
36. Paradise, pl. (5)
38. Father of, Arabic (3)
39. Pig's home (3)
43. Brine; ocean component, 2 wds. (8)
45. Dutch knife (4)
48. Folkloric man-eater (6)
50. Reynard (3)
52. Order proclaimed by authority (5)
54. Tillers by which rudders are controlled (5)
55. Avaricious (4)
56. House, lt. (4)
57. Fasten together (4)
58. Not in operation; slothful (4)
59. Small fresh water duck (4)
61. Cherish (4)
62. Lineage (4)
63. Inasmuch (4)
66. Trouble, afflict (3)

Last week's solution

سكز من ليل

Millions of Egyptians celebrated *Eid Al-Fitr*, marking the end of the holy month of Ramadan, in traditional ways that still enchant

Timeless images

Karkade wishes and kahk dreams

More than just a few days of relaxation, during the *Eid* a premium is placed on togetherness. Tarek El-Tablawy and Sakar El-Bahr profile the holiday that spans the social class spectrum

It's holiday time again in Egypt. After Ramadan's month-long fast, *Eid* has come around — a three-day period of bingeing and picnicking, pre-empted by buying new clothes. It's the season when several days before the appearance of the new crescent moon, which marks the end of the fasting and the start of the *Eid*, children in households spanning the barely coping to the extremely wealthy again get under their mothers' feet while *kahk* (cookies covered in powdered sugar) are being made. This is also the time of year when family members scattered around the country come together, commune in front of the television set, sipping tea or *karkade* (hibiscus), or take leisurely strolls through tree-lined streets.

Not only families, however, look forward to the *Eid* with *kahk*-baited breath. Shop owners and street vendors around the city, throughout the holy month of Ramadan, have slashed the prices of their wares in an effort to capitalise on one of the year's most rewarding shopping seasons. "During this time of year," said Mohamed Mushi, an owner of a clothing shop in the centre of Cairo, "consumers are looking to purchase new clothes for the *Eid*. They want to not only feel their best, they also want to look their best."

"The *Eid*," added Heba Moum, a manager of a tailor shop in Heliopolis, "is a time for new beginnings, when people, on the whole, put aside their day-to-day problems and just enjoy spending time with their families out in the open."

Many shop owners revealed that their sales figures more than treble during the last two weeks of Ramadan as shoppers, en masse, pound the pavements in search of quality products at bargain prices. But this year, although the crowds are again out in full force, window shopping versus actual purchasing is becoming the name of the game as inflation outpaces the rate of growth of family paychecks, especially those of lower-income families.

Increasingly, more and more working class family members are finding that they have less money to burn — and that their children are sufficiently moved by advertising to demand the latest products. Altaf Sayed, a 42-year old house cleaner and mother of five, is a case in point. Although her children have been pleading with her to buy new clothes, Altaf reluctantly had to keep purchases to a minimum. "All I have to spend this *Eid* is about LE200," she revealed. "This is not enough to get the children more than one item each. I know they want more, but the prices are just too high, even with the sales."

But if many children have had to do without new *Eid* outfits, few will accept excuses for their parents' forfeiting the *Eid* picnic. "I try to take the children out to the International Garden where they can run around and play, and then have lunch," Altaf explained. "This way they still feel that we are together and the issue of new clothes doesn't bother them too much. I want them to feel that we are together as a family during this season; and that it's not the money that will make the difference."

For members of working class households like Altaf's, there are still several Cairo outings which allow them to spend time together without needlessly squandering their cash. A day at the zoo, the Japanese Gardens, the International Garden or a drive to Al-Qanater Al-Khayria will reveal hundreds of thousands of Cairenes seated amid a mass of portable cooking stoves, with the scent of roast corn, sweet potato and the more pungent odor of *fi-seekh* (salted fish), wafting through the air. Parents sit basking in the sun while their children, clad in outfits as multi-coloured and brilliant as the small lanterns that lit up the Cairo nights during Ramadan, run around on the grass.

Zoo and park officials reveal that during the first day of *Eid*, over 250,000-300,000 visitors pass through their gates. And with ticket prices to these retreats in the middle of the city ranging from LE0.25 to LE1, they tend to draw a majority of the city's blue-collar population.

For the more affluent sections of society, however, the *Eid* holiday is an opportunity to get away from it all. Almost two months before the *Eid*, recalls Hassan Shukri, a travel agent, popular holiday destinations in Alexandria, Fayod, Sharm Al-Sheikh and Hurgada were fully booked. "There were no hotel rooms to be had, anywhere," he said.

So, while thousands like Altaf are sitting shoulder-to-shoulder in the zoo, the public gardens, or any other plot of grass they could find, others like Hisham Hakim, a businessman, will be lounging on the beach in Hurgada. "It cost me LE3,000, and I had to make the reservations months in advance, but I felt it necessary to get away from the city for a while," said Hakim. "Going away gives me the chance to spend some time in a quiet place with my two daughters and my wife."

Places like the zoo, which are frequented by low-income families, hold no appeal to Hakim during the *Eid*. "They're just too crowded, and more often than not, arguments break out over some really petty things. It's just better to get away," he stressed.

The pre-*Eid* preparations were sufficiently grueling and trying to convince Hakim that he made the right choice in traveling. "A week before the end of Ramadan, the streets after *iftar* were packed," he recalled. "You couldn't drive, you couldn't walk, you couldn't even breathe because there were so many people out shopping."

To escape not only for the *Eid*, but even the week preceding the holiday, those with a little more to spend are taking Hakim's idea one step further — they are traveling overseas. A CEO who wished to remain anonymous stated with relief that he and his family were going to London for a week. "I don't often get a chance to take a vacation, so I'm planning on making the most of this one," he stressed. "My family and I are going to do the *Eid* shopping at Selfridges or Harrods. But most importantly, we'll be together. The trip, he added, will cost him about LE27,000.

But these holidays are not just about spending and travelling, they are, after all, primarily a religious manifestation, albeit one now slightly veiled by an increasing consumerism. On the first day of the *Eid*, hundreds of thousands of bleary-eyed worshippers brave the cool chill of the morning and the rapping call of their warm beds in answer to the *muezzin's* call to *Eid* prayer.



Baking kahk



All the fun of the fair



A time for quiet reflection



photos: Al-Ahram



Does the cap fit?

photo: Deborah Doyle

Kahk appeal fades

MANY Ramadans ago, the demand for *kahk* (sugared biscuits filled with nuts, dates or *agony* — a mixture of flour, butter and sesame) sent most bakeries into a flurry of activity. Ahmed Foda, owner of a bakery in Al-Daher, recalled, "We used to stop our usual production of bread and confectioneries, work round the clock and employ more bakers to meet the demand."

Business is had these days for Foda and other *kahk* bakers. His bakery once made hundreds of trays daily, but today barely bakes 100. The decline in business means a decreased need to employ additional bakers. Other bakery owners located in popular districts complained that they have lost 50 per cent of their clients.

A store-bought kilo of *kahk* ranges from LE8 at

simple bakeries to LE45 at fancy sweet shops. "People who used to buy five kilos of *kahk* years ago, buy just two today because of its high prices," said Isam Azab, manager of Al-Gehad bakery in Dokki.

"Of course, I prefer to make the *kahk* with my own hands," said housewife Zeinab Ali. "I cannot be sure about the quality of the ingredients to readymade *kahk*."

Mona Mokhtar began baking *kahk* at home 10 years ago. Her home bakery has turned into a thriving business. "Making *kahk* is an art that requires training and talent," explained Mona.

Laila Ra'fat, another housewife *kahk* maker in Nasr City, started making *kahk* when her husband began experiencing financial difficulties. Working

eight hours a day, she made a significant contribution to alleviating her household's financial crisis. "A lot of customers take *kahk* to their relatives abroad. *Kahk* is also popular with Christians during their feasts," Laila said.

Like most things Egyptian, *kahk* has a Pharaonic origin. Pharaohs baked *kahk* in over 100 different shapes including cows, birds, and the sun. The sweet was made with honey and eaten with fruits, especially during the feasts of Hathor, Ra, Ptah and Amun. Aida Khatib, a researcher at the Folk Art Centre, said that ancient Egyptians kept *kahk* in their tombs in the shape of a doll as they believed that they would be resurrected and eat them.

Rashda Ragab and Zeinab Abul-Gheit

Morning glory

IT'S AN hour after the dawn prayer. As day-light begins to peep through the dark sky, greeting the advent of *Eid Al-Fitr*, marking the end of the holy month of Ramadan, voices pierce the horizon in glorification of God. The *adhan* (call to prayer) "Allah akbar, Allahu akbar, la illah illa Allah, Allahu akbar..." echoes all over the country, waking almost everyone from their morning slumber.

Groups of people pass the hour between the dawn prayer and the *Eid* prayer roaming the streets, praising God in what is traditionally called *massira* (march). Meanwhile, dozens of worshippers, mostly men dressed in *galabiyas*, veiled women and children rush out to catch the *Eid* prayer.

For the *Eid* prayer, thousands of worshippers line up in mosques and public squares, while those who could not make it watch from windows and balconies.

"I cannot feel the spirit of the *Eid* without performing its special prayer," says one worshipper on her way to the mosque with her husband and children. "Even my children, who are usually very lazy in the morning, excitedly prepare their clothes and veils for prayers the night before the *Eid*."

Unlike the ordinary prayers, the *imam* (prayer leader) calls "Allah akbar" (God is great) seven times in the first *raka'a* (sequence of positions during prayer) and six in the second while people repeat after him each time. Having finished with the prayers, the *imam* delivers a short *khutba* (religious sermon), usually on the rewards of fasting, *zakaat al-fitr* (alms for the poor), and how Muslims should enjoy the days of the *Eid* visiting relatives and friends.

Eid prayers are part of *sunna* (a tradition set down by the Prophet Mohamed). Muslims should wear their best clothes, have baths and wear *misk* (a scent) before heading to the prayer. It is said that Prophet Mohamed ate breakfast before prayers to break his fast, a ritual people still follow.

Sometime before the *Eid*, Muslims are asked to donate *Zakaat Al-Fitr*, a Ramadan ritual intended to spare the poor from the sinful act of begging during the *Eid*. During Prophet Mohamed's time, the amount was fixed in grains, mainly wheat. Today the amount is estimated to be LE5.

Gihan Shalhin

Feasting with the departed

EVERY *Eid* hundreds of men and black-clad women gather at the burial sites of their loved ones, recite the *Qur'an*, and exchange *shorok* — loaves of bread traditionally connected with the burial ritual. "My [late] husband would be very upset if I did not visit him on the first day of the *Eid*," one widow explained.

This *Eid* tradition dates back to Pharaonic Egypt when people visited the burial places of their departed, especially on holy religious festivals, to offer sacrifices and invoke the mercy of the gods on the souls of the deceased. The custom endured over the centuries and nowadays, the visit is a popular ritual.

Strangely enough, the cemetery visits are far from shrouded in gloom, but are considered a "day out" — a chance to get together and spend time with loved ones. The only exceptions, of course, are the first visits to the graves of the recently departed relatives.

The custom of frequenting burial sites on religious occasions should be for a specifically spiritual purpose, said Abdel-Moemin Nigm of Azhar University. "These visits are a reminder to people of death, judgement and doomsday while rendering them spiritually and mentally closer to God," Nigm said. Weeping and socialising are forbidden by Islam, he asserted however.

There are those who regard even having a tombstone marking the place of burial as alien to Islam. Others have outdone the standard Egyptian grave compartment by building spacious courtyards and reception rooms in marble, lit with crystal chandeliers, so that their dearly departed may rest in peace.

Ghada Helmy

Treading softly in Sinai

Sinai is the object of long-term environmental conservation efforts by the European Union and the Egyptian Environment Affairs Agency. Rehab Saad joined a delegation monitoring activities from the rocky shores of Ras Mohamed to the mountains of central Sinai

European Union (EU) and the Egyptian Environment Affairs Agency (EEAA) have been cooperating on a multi-dimensional project in Sinai. Its basic objective of protecting the region's environment is allied with parallel aims of promoting tourist development and developing the local economy.

Its efforts to reconcile these sometimes conflicting agendas were recently on view to journalists and environmental experts, invited to Ras Mohamed — at the southernmost tip of the Sinai Peninsula — and to Saint Catherine's Monastery and its surrounding area.

Ras Mohamed, which includes the areas of Abu Galum and Nabq (between Taba and Sharm Al-Sheikh) is now a fully-operational nature reserve. A first sight of its rock-strewn, barren landscape might make one wonder what there is to protect. But appearances are deceptive: this land houses varieties of desert plants, insects and birds. But the real key to the area's fame lies in the water — home to magnificent coral reefs and a variety of sea creatures, unsurpassed elsewhere in the world; its fish species alone number over 1000.

Implementation of the project began in 1989. According to Ahmed Shehata, the national park's coordinator, the EU initially contributed around \$1 million to buy equipment, train rangers and increase the awareness of local people. The Egyptian government contributed LE4.3 million to establish the infrastructure and cover construction. From 1993 to 1995 the EU contributed another \$4 million, Egypt LE2 million. The third and final phase of development will last for another five years, and will cost \$16 million and LE2 million.

The concept of an integrated approach was crucial from the start: Ras Mohamed is user-friendly for tourists, but measures have been taken to minimise their impact on the area and to ensure that their presence is never at the expense of the environment.

Signposts, colour-coded to indicate approved routes, are everywhere, along with a sign system of instructions, both for safety matters and to remind visitors to leave the park as they found it. "We carried out a survey and found that 97 per cent of people do not read instructions, so we changed the system", said Michael Pearson, Ras Mohamed National Park sector development project manager. Pictorial signs are used to show people not to throw garbage, where snorkelling is prohibited, etc. New brochures now in production will use these symbols.

More than 140 buoys have been placed around the coastline to indicate that anchoring is forbidden on the reefs. Fines for ignoring them are steep, ranging from LE500 to LE3,000, or one year's imprisonment. For a second violation, the fine can mount to LE10,000.

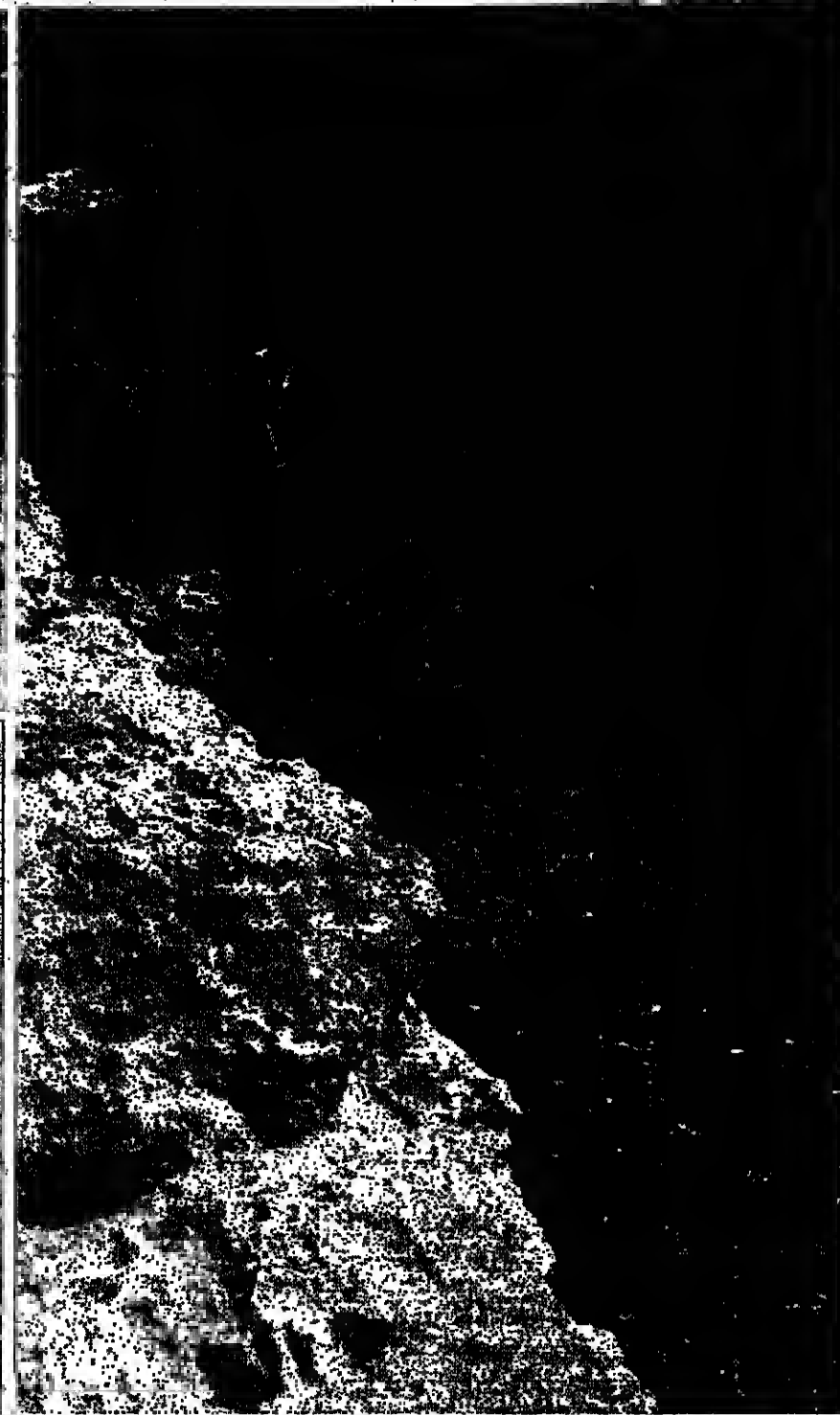
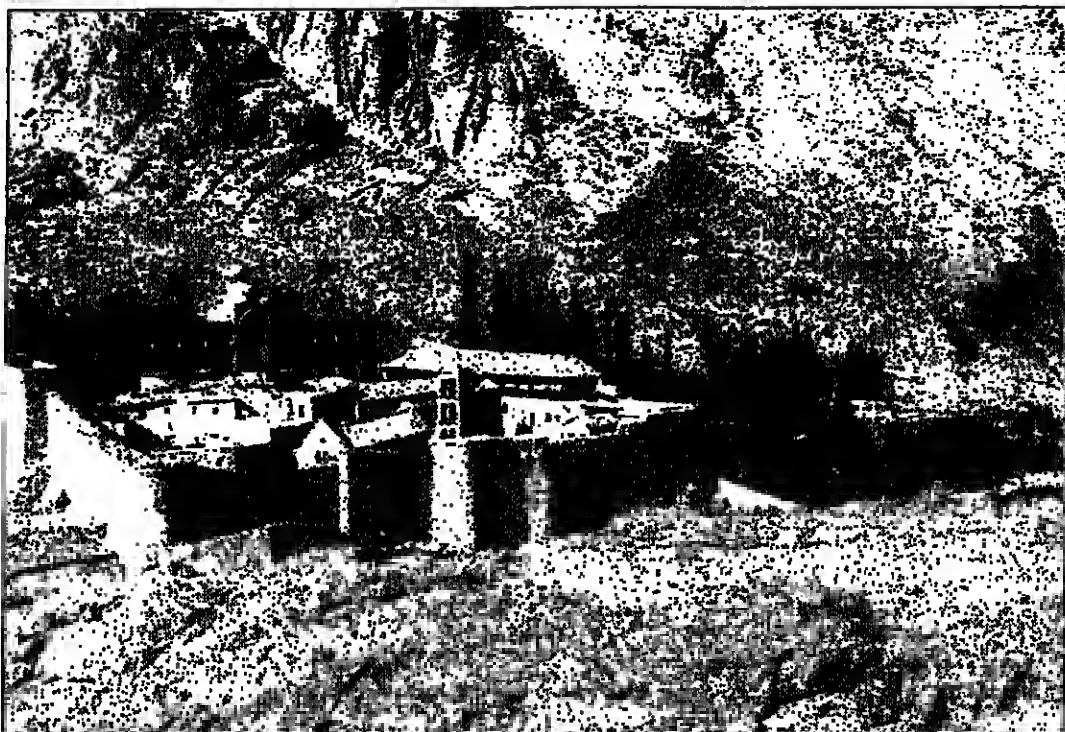
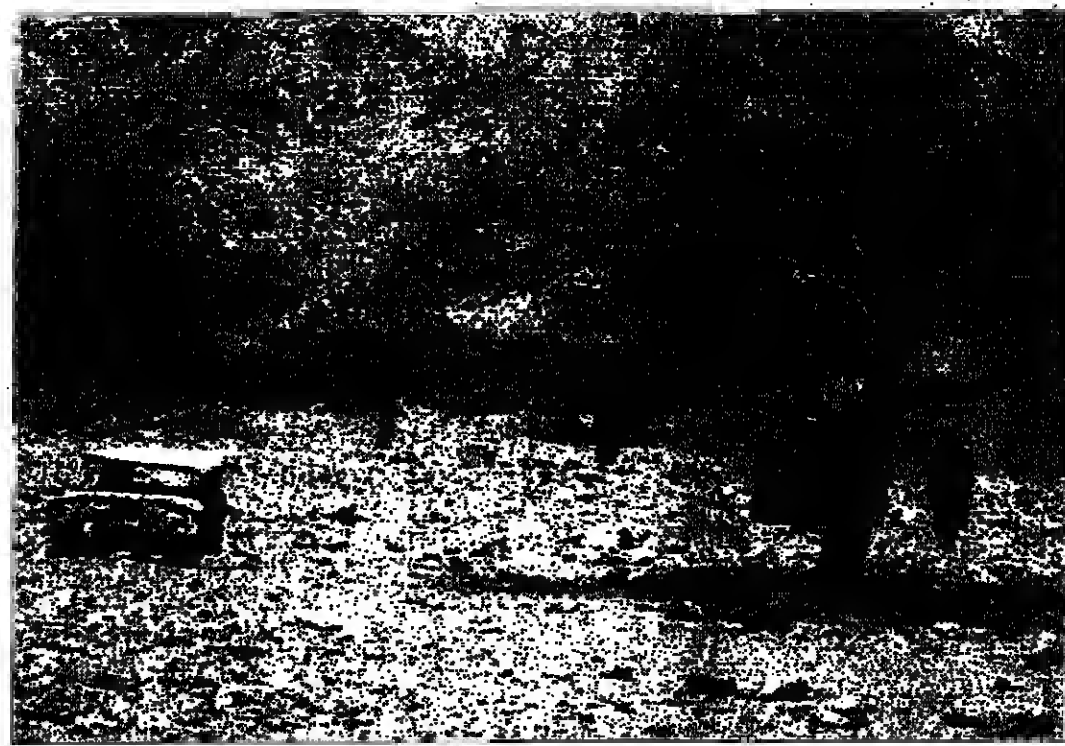
To supervise the area, the park employs 12 uniformed rangers, on call 24 hours a day. They drive round in jeeps and are licensed life-savers — equipped for land or water.

"A visitors' centre helps increase tourist awareness. Overlooking the sea, it is a first stop for many tourists. Here, they can see slides of marine and desert life, be informed about nature trails, observe the area through telescopes, and last but not least, replenish themselves at the cafeteria."

Meanwhile, away from the public eye, a tool for detailed observation of the park's wildlife and plantlife is Ras Mohamed's own laboratory, where flora, birds, gazelle, fox and ibex are monitored.

But the scope of the project stretches beyond merely protecting natural life and making tourists aware of the area's environmental assets. Outside the wide open spaces, there is another aspect to the project's work, considered by Pearson to be its most important role: the provision of free consultation to investors and local authorities.

"A monitoring unit studies the ecological implications of proposed developments on coastal resources, and the park management then accepts the proposal or suggests modifications that, Pearson explains, "will mitigate or eliminate anticipated damage". According to Pearson, this service has already provided Ras Mohamed National Park with an opportunity to establish partnerships with individual



Three of the protected areas are the barren landscape inland from Abu Galum (top left), the mountains around Saint Catherine's monastery (bottom left) and Ras Mohamed (right)

developers. "It is important for the developer to recognise the existence of the national park and guarantee not to alter or damage the coastline, not to discharge waste without prior approval, to prevent all domestic drainage from reaching the sea, and to make their guests aware of national park regulations."

This kind of cooperation between project officials and investors is already well established at the Sheikh Coast tourist village which lies within the borders of the park on the Gulf of Aqaba. "There was consultation at every step of the project", said Pearson. "We inspected the marinas and the docks, as well as floating swimming pools, built in the sea and protected by rubber and oars."

The project does not allow tourist developments everywhere. Nor does it restrict itself to tourist projects in its promotion of a healthy local economy. The Nabq area of Ras Mohamed is a case in point. A unique area of great environmental interest, the inland region is bisected by wadis containing sub-

stantial vegetation, supporting wildlife. On the shore, mangrove swamps extend for over 4km of the coastline. The area has been zoned and classified as a "multiple-use managed area". Tourist developments are not allowed in Nabq but Shehata described other developments promoted by the project, including an experimental shrimp farm, which provide the means to diversify activities in south Sinai and provide employment for the local Bedouin residents.

With the success of work in the Ras Mohamed area, plans are afoot to expand the project to include the entire Gulf of Aqaba region. This would include a national park in Wadi Watir in Taba, the great dried-out river bed that cuts through narrow ravines to the Gulf of Aqaba, rich both in fauna and flora and mineral resources like Nubian sandstone. Feasibility studies are still in progress, although, according to Shehata, there is provisional approval. "We've already signed a financing memo with the EU to develop the whole area up to Taba," he said.

Meanwhile, project leaders have their eyes on the National Park of Saint Catherine, a vast mountainous region of south central Sinai, an area of 9,000 square kilometres. Their work would exclude the Monastery of St. Catherine itself, which, EU officials say, would require separate funding. Pearson stressed, however, that there would be cooperation in work on the monastery and on its surrounding area. Project staff, he said, "would be able to identify the restoration needs of the religious institution and give technical assistance."

Researchers from Suez Canal University presented a draft study to the EU, which in turn sent experts to carry out full feasibility and environmental studies. The \$8.5 million project aims at protecting the natural, religious and Bedouin heritage of the region over a five-year period, stretching from 1996 to 2001. The EU will pay 77 per cent of the costs, \$6.5 million; the Egyptian government is slated to contribute \$2 million.

As at Ras Mohamed, protection of the natural

world will go hand in hand with protecting and enhancing the livelihood of local people. "All hunting will be forbidden. But we will also try to improve the Bedouins' standard of living", said Stefan Zens, EU development advisor to the project. He wants to create a source of revenue for the Bedouins by training them for tourist-related jobs such as tour guide or ranger. "I believe that without the Bedouins, who, after all, are a part of the environment, we can't do anything," said Zens. "It is their land and they know the area well."

When the Gulf of Aqaba area is developed, especially after the conclusion of the peace process in the Middle East, there is likely to be a much greater influx of tourists. "Already the monastery receives from 1,500 to 3,000 visitors a day, and the number is expected to increase", Pearson predicted. In his view, and the views of all those concerned with Sinai's environment, it is essential for the future of the whole region that this development takes place along ecologically-sound lines.

EGYPT AIR

Telephone numbers of EGYPT AIR offices in governorates:

Abu Simbel Sales Office:	324836-324735
Alexandria Office: Ramli:	4833357-4821778
Gleem:	5865461-5865434
Airport Office:	4218464-4227886-4228237-4281989
Aswan Office:	3159061/2/3/4
Airport Office:	486387-486568
Assiut Office:	323151-322711-324000-329407
Mansoura Office:	363978-363733
Hurghada Office:	4435914
Airport Office:	442833-443597
Ismailia Office:	328937-321958-321951/2-328936
Luxor Office:	384538/1/2/3/4
Airport Office:	382567/8
Luxor Office Karnak:	382360
Marsa Matruh Office:	934398
Menoufia Office (Sheikh El Kham):	233382-233523-233522
New Valley Office:	883/901695
Port Said Office:	224123-222878-2289721
Port Said Office Karnak:	238333-239978
Sharm El Sheikh Office:	684314-684409
Airport Office:	684408
Taba Office:	468/53010-53011
Direct:	5783624
Tanta Office:	3117504/311788
Zakazik Office:	349825-349830/1



CHILD PRINCESS: This delicate replica bust of the princess Bekef-Atun, daughter of Akhenaten, is a copy of the original on display at the Louvre in Paris, reports Nevine EL-Aref.

It is a white limestone bust with touches of colour that was found at Tel Al-Amarna in the workshop of the sculptor Tutmoses.

"The princess wears the side-lock showing that she was a mere child," says Mohamed Saleh, director of the Egyptian Museum.

Replicas of the bust are produced and sold at the Centre of Ancient Egyptian Art Revival in Zamalek.

Action all round

THE MARINE Archaeological Institute in Alexandria is soon to embark on the second phase of a salvage operation from a sunken ship near Sa'dana Island in the Red Sea. A number of objects dating from the 17th century, among them porcelain plates, pottery and unusual brass pots, have previously been salvaged. Restoration of previously salvaged items is also planned as part of the operation's second phase.

MAJOR development projects aimed at promoting tourism are planned for South Sinai. An international airport is to be built at Dahab, one of the main resorts on the Aqaba Gulf and a total of 80 new tourist projects have been approved, which will increase South Sinai's tourist capacity to 20,000 rooms. Developers for the area between Ras Mohamed National Park and Tur City on the Gulf of Suez have been selected from international tenders.

EXCAVATIONS in Tel Al-Luli in Sinai, 25km east of the Suez Canal, have yielded a huge bath and a number of reservoirs dating from the 3rd century. The newly-discovered bath, adorned with mosaics and inscriptions, is the biggest of five which have now been uncovered in the area. The Supreme Council of Antiquities (SCA) has allocated LE500,000 to continue excavations.

EGYPT and the World Tourism Organisation (WTO) are cooperating to promote the country abroad. One suggestion is that the WTO should establish a project aimed at preserving the Egyptian environment. Another is to construct tourist training centres in Egypt which could ultimately serve the whole Middle East.

JAPAN has granted 41 million yen (\$387,000) to the SCA to buy new equipment for use in conservation and restoration projects, including ventilation equipment, humidity reduction devices and computers to control the amount of light, temperature and humidity inside tombs.

CHARTER flights from abroad may land at any airport in Egypt with the exception of Cairo, according to a new ruling. They are only permitted to land at Cairo Airport on their return journey, carrying passengers home. The only exception to this rule are charter flights carrying tourists from destinations not covered by EgyptAir.

KOREA, Scandinavia, Latin America and the Benelux countries — Belgium, the Netherlands and Luxembourg — are being targeted for tourist promotion this year, according to Adel Abdel-Aziz, head of the Egyptian Tourist Authority. He added that there were also plans to increase the number of ETA regional offices, both abroad and in Egypt, including new offices in Siwa, Khan Al-Khalil and Old Cairo.

THE SECOND festival of "Alexandria of the world" will be held in Alexandria this year, with a performance of the opera *Othello* as its highlight. The Ministry of Tourism, Alexandria Governorate, and the regional organisation for the promotion of tourism in Alexandria are cooperating to invite representatives from more than 20 cities called Alexandria worldwide. Events will include folkloric art demonstrations, pop concerts, a fashion show, exhibitions of products and plastic arts from all the Alexandrias, as well as the opera.



Abdel-Moneim Emara, President of the Egyptian Football Federation, presents a commemorative plate to Amr Zaki, a member of the Ismaili Club's board of members, during the closing ceremony of the Horus Club Ramadan Soccer Tournament. Photos: Ahmed Afifi

A Ramadan festival of football

President Hosni Mubarak and government ministers witnessed the finals and closing ceremony of the Horus Club Ramadan Soccer Tournament. Inas Mazhar was there

Fans at the final of the Horus Club Ramadan Soccer Tournament last night were surprised to find a famous spectator in their midst: President Hosni Mubarak. The president joined the three "big" teams — Zamalek, Tarsana, and Ismailia — accompanied by Prime Minister Kamel El-Ganzouri, Defence Minister Hosni El-Sherpi, and Abdel-Moneim Emara, head of the Supreme Council for Youth and Sports, as well as top sporting and media officials.

The evening kicked off at 9 p.m. with an

exhibition by the basketball team, the Giants, in which 22 Giant talents gave a stunning display of basketball skills.

Then it was back to football. In the first final, for under-35s, the National Democratic Party Youth Team were able to defeat the Menshiat Al-Bakry Youth Centre 3-3.

The game was followed by two exhibition matches, the first between film stars and sports veterans, the second between sports veterans and the media figures.

Then it was the turn of the over 35-year-

olds, an event in which Mubarak had a personal interest. The Sokour team, lead by his eldest son Alaa, was matched against the Ismaili Veterans, and the president had the pleasure of watching his son's team demolish the opposition 4-0 to win the title for the second year running. However, Gamal, the president's second son, who had played with the team throughout the tournament, was unable to take part in the final because he was travelling abroad.

The defending champions played a strong

game and displayed a high level of skills, with especially good performances from playmaker Alaa Mubarak, the team's top scorer Mouafiq Mobamed, and goalie Yasser Abdel-Khaleq, who was selected as the tournament's best goalkeeper — another coup for Abdel-Khaleq, who was also named best goalkeeper in Ahli's Ramadan tournament two weeks ago.

Before the match, President Mubarak shook hands with referee Gamal El-Ghandour and praised the standard of Egyptian refereeing, advising El-Dahshouri Harb, president of the

Egyptian Football Federation, not to use foreign referees for local matches when there were plenty of better local referees available. He also took the opportunity to meet young people in the breaks between the matches, even taking the initiative to continue conversations on sport and studies with some of them later.

After the evening's final match, medals and cups were presented to the winners by Abdel-Moneim Emara, head of the Supreme Council for Youth and Sports.

Ahli volley to victory

The sky seems to be the limit for Ahli's volleyball team, as they win their third consecutive league championship. Abdel Anwar attended

Last week, Ismailia's indoor hall played host to the first volleyball superleague. On that occasion Ahli were able to trounce arch-rivals Zamalek 3-0. In the second tournament, again matching the two top teams with Tersana and Tairan, it looked at one stage as though Zamalek might bow out of the final, leaving the showdown to Ahli and Tersana. But Zamalek managed to come back from the brink and survived to face Ahli in the final.

Ahli was all set to repeat their first superleague performance, this time in the Cairo Stadium's indoor halls. While Ahli had their eyes on the league title — decided by this competition if they were to win — Zamalek wanted to save face, take revenge on their rivals and keep in with a chance in the league.

Despite the high stakes, neither team was on top form, largely due to injury. Ahli's top player, Hamed El-Sherpi, was injured in an early match against Tersana. In addition, neither Mohamed Abdel-Karim nor Mohamed Meselhi, key players, recovered from surgery undergone in Germany.

Zamalek were also unlucky. Their top player, Nihad Shehata, was suffering from a painful shoulder injury, and the team were without substitutes.

After third and fourth places had been decided by a match in which Tersana beat Tairan 3-1, the final was close for a battle of the giants.

In front of a massive crowd, Ahli took the lead 4-1 in the first set. But Zamalek quickly got on top and took advantage of some silly mistakes by the opposition to win the set 15-13. Tension was broken only momentarily when Ahli's Ayman Rushdie spiked a ball into his own side and took back the amusement at his own mistake.

In the second set, Ahli was on the attack. It seemed as if the team had sworn that there was no way they were going to lose this match. They began spiking very hard balls, while Zamalek's defence was unable to return, leaving them to take the set 15-10.

Ahli was back in control. As Zamalek wilted, Ahli won the third and fourth sets 15-7 and 15-10.

Injuries aside, Zamalek's main problem was a lack of teamwork. When the chips were really down, they were unable to find the will to fight back as they had done earlier. There was even some fighting between teammates. However, this is not to underestimate the performances of players like Ashraf Abu Hassan, Ahmed Kamal and Ashraf Rashid, a new team member with a lot of potential.

Ahli's success can be largely attributed to the presence of Abdel-Karim and Meselhi, who were put into play despite the fact that they were recovering from surgery. Both players managed to overcome their pain until the last minute in the fourth set, when Meselhi screamed out in pain and had to be taken out of the match. "I had no choice but to put back these players in," explained coach Ibrahim Fakhraddin, "I realised that otherwise the team would be in danger of losing the match 3-0, not because they are weak players, but because of lack of experience."

Their second superleague win brought Ahli their third consecutive league victory. The exultant players danced the samba on court. "I just can't express how happy I feel to win," commented captain Maged Mustafa. It was a victory they deserved, he said, earned by enthusiasm and strong play. Mohamed Fat'h, Zamalek's captain, whose weak performance had contributed to his team's defeat, had no comments. After Abdel-Aziz, Zamalek's coach, had just one: "Ahli were better than us. We gave them the opportunity on a silver platter."



Zamalek player attempt to block a ball from Ahli's Meselhi

Eid thoughts from abroad

After four weeks of fasting, there's the feasting. But for Egyptian athletes, spending Eid abroad, the holiday may be just another day of competition. Some sportsmen and women share their memories with the Weekly

Eid is a time for families to be together, a time to be at home, to relax. The two Eids each have their special traditions. This one, the lesser Eid marking the end of Ramadan, is characterised by massive consumption of *kahk* and *ghorayba* — traditional biscuits. The day begins early as crowds through the streets for special dawn prayers, before returning home to change into brand new clothes and spend the rest of the day visiting, eating and chatting. The streets are deserted; the only people about seem to be children, looking for the perfect way to spend their *eidya* — new banknotes to be spent on toys, sweets, or fireworks. But what about those who can't be at home? How do they celebrate in countries where Eid is just another day? And how do Egypt's sportsmen and women cope when not only is Eid not a holiday, but it happens to fall in the midst of a major championship?

The national volleyball team celebrated the Eid in Kenya last March, in the middle of the African Nations Cup qualification matches. This didn't stop the players from celebrating their holiday. They went to the nearest Islamic centre and said the Eid prayers. In addition, national team coach Azmi Megahed, who happens to own a patisserie shop, had come to Kenya well-prepared — laden with kilos of *kahk* and *ghorayba*. Determined not to let any other Egyptian traditions pass them by, the players asked Seif Abul-Naga, head of the Egyptian delegation, for an *eidya*, and each player received a crisp LE20 note. The players tried to push their luck even further, but to no avail. "We asked for new clothes as well," said one of the team. "But the officials refused, so we had to buy clothes from our own money."

Essam Zidan, a member of Egypt's disabled swimming team said that he had spent many Eids outside Egypt. For most of them, the team had prayed with captain Sayed El-Shazli acting as imam, after listening to the prayers on the radio. "We also asked him for *eidya* — and he gave us each a new 25 piastre note." A symbolic amount, hardly enough to buy anything, but then Zidan says that he's never been in the habit of buying new outfits for the Eid.

But for table tennis champion Hesham Hilmi, new clothes are a priority. Sometimes it's his only celebration: "Often it doesn't feel like the Eid for me because I have to train hard and play a lot of matches, with all the accompanying tension that it brings," he said.

Basketball players are luckier. Although the team sometimes have competitions in Ramadan, in recent years they have been able to get home in time to celebrate Eid with their families. But it hasn't always been like that. Captain Riyad Sharara, a sports commentator and ex-national basketball player recalls an Eid spent abroad

with his teammates in 1959. The team were playing in the World Military Basketball Championship, which began towards the end of Ramadan in Brussels. Despite the fact that so many team members were fasting, the team still managed to come a respectable third. In this case the players were able to take advantage of the short winter days of northern Europe — the weather was cold, the sun went down early and the matches were held after *iftar* (breakfast at dusk). The tournament ran over into the Eid holidays, but the first day of Eid was anything but a non-event. At an early hour, the Egyptian ambassador paid a surprise visit and joined the players for a slap-up breakfast. Then all the team went shopping for new clothes for themselves and their families.

Egypt's young swimming champion, Ramia El-wani, is now in America. Unwilling to let their daughter celebrate the holiday alone, her parents went to the US, taking plenty of *kahk* and *ghorayba* with them. It was the family's first Eid abroad.

Ismail El-Rawi, a veteran diver, has a memory of a special Eid — the one that coincided with his first international competition, the World Universities Championships in Spain in 1955, where El-Rawi was representing Cairo University. The day started with Eid prayers with 150 fellow athletes. Afterwards they ate biscuits prepared by the team's organisers and then everyone resumed their competition or training. "It was a real Eid for me, and one that I'll never forget," said El-Rawi, "I took a bronze medal in my event."

Egypt's squash champion Amir Wagih, has twice spent Eid competing in the English Open. "Of course we missed being in Egypt for the Eid celebrations," Wagih recalled. "But Egyptian families living in England invited us to their homes, so we didn't have to miss out on *kahk* and *ghorayba*." Wagih was not so lucky in Belgium, where he once spent the Eid Al-Adha with coach Gamal El-Amir. The coach promised to cook the traditional meal of that feast, *jajaja* (meat with rice and bread). A valiant attempt, which resulted in what Wagih described as the worst *jajaja* he'd ever tasted. Eventually the whole team went to a restaurant.

Sometimes, though, players will go to any trouble and expense to get home for the holidays. Some years ago, Riyad Sharara was on a tour of the Far East. "I was supposed to get home for the second day of Eid, but I just couldn't accept this," he said. He went to Singapore Airport to try and get an earlier flight, but spent three hours in vain. So he booked a ticket to Rome and from there managed to get to Egypt before the dawn of Eid. It had cost him a lot of money to get home to his friends and family — but it was worth it.

Jog like an Egyptian

A modern marathon in an ancient setting: runners from around the world gathered across the Nile from the Valley of the Kings to run a course passing some of the world's greatest monuments. Eman Abdel-Moeti reports from Luxor

Running is a great way to exercise. Luxor is a great place to go sightseeing. Combine the two, and you have a great event: the Egyptian Marathon.

At eight o'clock in the morning of April 1st, more than 1,100 amateur athletes from 14 countries took their first step in a 42.195km marathon which began on the west bank of Luxor. The starting line was at the Temple of Karnak, and the finish line was at the Luxor Run, and the 12.336km Run.

To the cheers of children who came from the maize fields to view the spectacle, the runners ran a course passing historical sites like the Theban Necropolis and the Valley of the Kings. About 300 Egyptian athletes took part, joined by 600 foreign runners, most of whom came from Germany, Poland, Norway, Sweden, the Netherlands and other Arab and Mediterranean countries.

"This is our biggest marathon so far," said Gasser Riad, one of the organisers. In the first year, when the race took place at the Giza Pyramids, 30 Egyptians and 400 foreigners participated. Last year, 90 Egyptians, and 600 foreigners ran in Luxor. The first two races were organised by Germany, under the auspices of the Association of International Marathons and Road Races (AIMS), and the International Amateur Athletic Federation (IAAF), which listed the Egyptian Marathon in its calendar of events. This year, as part of an impetus to promote sports, tourism and tourism, Egyptian bodies like the Egyptian Tourism Authority (ETA), and the Sports, Youth and Leisure Committee of the Supreme Council for Youth and Sports collaborated to make 90 per cent of the organisation

Egyptian. From the German side, *Lauf Ziel* sports magazine, issued by AIMS and IAAF, took care of checkpoints and water provision for participants, who were running in 27°C temperatures.

This year, the winners were Egyptian too. Mohamed El-Morsi, a member of the national athletics team from Alexandria, won the marathon in 02:34:22, followed by Germany's Haensch Uwe in 02:36:51, and Khabat Lutz in 02:38:15. El-Morsi will compete in the International Hamburg Mar-

athon this year.

About five per cent of the participants were women. First across the line was Tanzanian Kathrin of Germany who finished in 03:01:11, followed by her fellow countrywoman, Ehrke Christin with 03:02:41. Maisto Valentina of Italy finished third with 03:12:31.

Mohamed Abdel-Moneim of Cairo won the half marathon in 1:16:27. Hamdy Kamal from Qena, who ran while fasting, won the Ramses Run. During

the prize-giving reception, in which the winners were presented with air tickets to Europe or Egypt, the youngest competitor, seven-year-old El-Sayed Nasser, was awarded a special prize for participating in the Ramses Run.

For the European participants, running against a backdrop of some of the world's greatest monuments was a big attraction. Last year's winner, German Jorg Otto, came in fourth this year. His prize was a ticket back to Egypt, "so I decided to compete

this year," he said. He will move on to Hurgada to take part in a 10km fun run. "It's an opportunity to enjoy the sun, sea and sand," he said.

Gerhard Eichlev from the Netherlands also plans to travel further — in his case as far as Tanzania, where he plans to climb Mount Kilimanjaro. A group of amateur runners from Denmark enjoyed the warm weather as much as the competition. "It's snowing in Denmark, so we're loving this sunny weather," one of them remarked. The mild weather was also a benefit for a 63-year-old German woman, competitor, but she also had a point to prove: "I believe there is no limit to running in terms of age. I really enjoyed running in such warm weather around historic sites," she said. She plans to come to Egypt for the marathon every year.

Abdel-Wahid Abdel-Aziz of the Supreme Council for Youth and Sports was very happy with this year's event, particularly the number of Egyptians competing. "Running doesn't require large expense for participants, nor costly facilities for event organisers," he said. "I'd like to see at least 1,000 Egyptians take part in future marathons."

Other marathons attract enormous numbers of competitors. German organiser Gasser Riad sees no reason why the Egyptian marathon should not follow suit. "Around 11,000 people take part in the Hamburg International Marathon, 12 per cent of which are women, and most of them are Germans," he said. "We hope the Egyptian marathon becomes as popular as other international marathons."

Edited by Inas Mazhar



On course: runners in the Egyptian marathon photo: Thabet Fares

MIXING tourism with sports was the theme of the Egyptian Marathon, which was part of a travel agency trip sponsored by the Egyptian Tourism Authority and the Supreme Council of Youth and Sports, reports Rehab Saad from Luxor.

Adel Abdel-Aziz, head of the Egyptian Tourism Authority (ETA), noted that the extensive international media coverage of the event, coupled with the over 100 participants who will relay their experiences in Egypt back home, will be good publicity for the Upper Egyptian city.

"It will be engraved in the memory of the participants that they ran among ancient Egyptian monuments from Hatshepsut's temple to the Memnon colossi," said Abdel-Aziz.

He added that the ETA is keen on spon-

soring such events. "We have a schedule of events which mix tourism with sports. There will be a rowing contest in Luxor, Aswan, and Cairo, horse festivals in Sharqiya, and fish festivals in Hurgada and Sharm Al-Sheikh," Abdel-Aziz said.

The ETA is trying to turn these events into international ones by publicising them abroad, according to Abdel-Aziz. A film of this marathon will be screened at the Berlin international tourist exhibition, the biggest tourist gathering in the world.

German participant Christoph Wenzel looks forward to visiting Hurgada after the race. Julianne Jahns who came in third in the women's race, also ran in the marathon two years ago. "People cheering us on were very friendly and encouraging," she said.



Mahmoud Mahfouz: The frontier syndrome

He has spent the past fifty years working hard. His involvement runs the gamut, from pioneering medical studies to government positions to social work. A former minister of health and a doctor passionately involved in curing his patients, he consistently pushes beyond the cutting edge



L-r: always at the forefront, all the way through the Nasser era; with Hussein El-Shafe'i (centre), former vice-president; exchanging pleasantries with Chinese leader Chen En-La; addressing the Shura Council, its president, Mostafa Kamal Helmi in the background; with renowned cardiologist Zohri Farrag; a collection of fine replicas of Pharaonic busts and artefacts in the computerized clinic contribute to a unique bedside manner



photo: Sherif Sobhy

In Mahmoud Mahfouz's life there have certainly been many of the landmarks which leave indelible traces upon the personality. His father, Mohamed Pasha Mahfouz, had three wives and 18 sons and daughters. "All these people lived under one roof, and we felt like one family."

The dominant personality in Mahmoud's life was his father.

Although a formidable personality, as fathers tended to be at that time, he tried to compensate his son emotionally for the absence of his mother, who had died when Mahmoud was only a year old. "He always singled me out, either to sit next to him, or to receive an extra sweet, or even with a gesture that made me feel warm and secure."

Born in Assiut in 1923, Mahfouz comes from a lineage that can be traced back some 30 generations.

He attended primary school in Assiut, then moved to Helwan to continue his education. Mahfouz was "exposed" at an early age to the world outside Egypt, the Arab world. The mixed assortment of Arab nationalities at the Helwan secondary school inevitably gave rise to an animated discussions and developed an early feeling of an Arab consciousness, or Arab nationalism.

He pauses briefly, as the emotions aroused by memories play across his face.

"I was 18 years old, and had succeeded in my final exams, while all my other brothers had failed. I rushed to my father with the news and asked for my reward. He asked me how I had been ranked in my class, and I told him twelfth."

Twelfth out of a class of twenty-five, his father pointed out, was not a very impressive performance.

Insult was added to injury when Mahmoud discovered that his brothers, who had failed, had been given 20 piastres each — a princely sum at the time. At the end of three days of self-imposed isolation, which the patriarch deemed sufficient time for reflection,

be summoned Mahmoud.

"It was this session with my father that really set me on my path in life. He explained that I had not been rewarded for a reason. He didn't want me to rest on my laurels. What was wrong with top of the class?" The brothers, on the other hand, had been rewarded in order to encourage them to continue.

Mahfouz Pasha then asked Mahmoud to reorganise the family library.

"Although my father had no formal education, he was a keen and wide-ranging reader," says Mahfouz. "His request that I organise the library was a major landmark in my life. The exercise opened up a whole new world; a world of books, ideas, opinions, unbelievable vistas of knowledge."

He was immediately and irrevocably "afflicted" with a burning thirst for knowledge. "The desire to find things out has been my main driving force. I think one can accomplish anything, if one takes the trouble to simply find out how it is done. This you invariably find in books."

His father's encouragement left deep marks. Although Mahfouz's education was scientific, he was also president of the Literary Club. His hobbies were equally diverse: drawing and making model aeroplanes. "Aeroplanes were very new, on the frontiers of science, and this frontier syndrome always had a strong appeal for me."

What made a youth with a talent for drawing and an interest in aircraft join medical school?

"Two things, really," he explains. "My

father died in my arms. There I was, helplessly watching this man, whom I loved and honoured, just slip away from me. There was nothing I could do. This presented me with a challenge. I must become involved with life and death somehow."

The other reason was that, although he was very fond of agriculture, several of his brothers were already studying it and were actively involved in farming the family estates.

"I chose radiology because it was new, a challenge, much like my interest in aeroplanes during school." He went on to London for post-graduate studies in radiology, oncology and nuclear medicine.

Today he is considered the undisputed founder of nuclear medicine in Egypt; internationally, he is the doyen of his field, with students practicing in countries ranging from Morocco to Thailand and Australia.

Perhaps his most remarkable trait is his

your patient." This is said with a passion that leaves no doubt as to his conviction.

"I handle a great deal of terminal patients. Although it is always sad to lose one, there is great satisfaction when the relatives thank you for all that you have done."

Mahfouz is deeply involved in the various aspects of his life; the passion with which he fights disease recalls the fervour of the intellectuals of the 1940s. He is just as deeply enmeshed in his social relations.

His large, upper-class family, closely connected to the land, afforded him early exposure to a set of relations that contributed to forming his extroverted personality.

"Although most of my schooling was in Cairo, every summer we had to spend part of our vacation in Assiut. My father insisted on this to ensure that we never lost sight of our roots," he recalls. "I noticed how everyone addressed my father as 'ya ammi' ['uncle' in Arabic]. I was also impressed by the concern and interest he displayed, how he went out of his way to assist where he could."

The vivid memory of his father's close, warm, if somewhat feudal relations with the village inhabitants taught Mahfouz a lesson he could not have learned in books: "You are strong within your surroundings, within your family and friends, among those whom you have helped and who have helped you."

During his college years he joined a social work society that gave discreet assistance to needy students. During World War II there was an acute shortage of shoes. Mahfouz fondly remembers:

"We formed a producers' cooperative, manufactured shoes and marketed them with great success. The government stepped in, however, and fixed the price of the shoes, bringing the project to financial collapse."

His involvement in various associations developed exponentially, and today he is a member or founder of more than 18 scientific and social societies. He mentions the Pugwash Conference on Science and World Affairs with particular pride. Convened in 1957, the conference, which gathered scientists from East and West for an exchange of views on the Cold War, publicised the dangers of war in the nuclear age and was endorsed by the likes of Einstein and Bertrand Russell, still meets regularly.

Mahfouz was nominated and accepted as a member of the Pugwash Conference in 1968. His inaugural address, entitled "towards a peaceful settlement of the Arab/Israeli conflict", was based on the idea that peace with Israel could only come through peace with Egypt.

"I was weaned on politics," he says with an infectious chuckle. "Theory suggests that embryos are somehow affected by their external surroundings: well, politics was almost the sole topic of conversation at home."

His interest in politics was further reinforced by his marriage to his cousin, the daughter of Naguib El-Hilali Pasha, Egypt's last Prime Minister under Farouk. "Naguib Pasha had a profound influence on my life," he says. "Here was someone of great stature, with an unblemished record and profound national consciousness. Besides the fact that I was his son-in-law, we had a teacher-student relationship. He gave me the benefit of his experience and his skill at formulating clear and precise presentations of any issue." Naguib El-Hilali also taught him how to utilise facts and develop an analytical argument with unequivocal conclusions; Mahfouz firmly believes that a good presentation of any position is the battle half won.

This skill stood him in good stead, whether in defending his inheritance rights upon his father's death, or in public life as minister of health.

"Upon my appointment as minister of health in 1972, I asked Prime Minister Aziz Sidqi never to refuse any request submitted for budgetary or other approval, because I assured him that it would always be unambiguous, thoroughly studied, and definitely essential." His policy as minister of health from 1972 to 1974 was formulated on three axes: optimum use of existing facilities, development of human resources, especially the nursing profession, and developing a registration system.

He feels very strongly that prevention and protection of children's health, up to the age of nine years will save millions in health care at a later stage.

Today, Mahfouz is head of the Services Committee of the Shura Council, and chairman of the board at Sixth of October City's private university. Actually, the institution has not been officially designated as a university; rather, it is a grouping of 11 higher institutes which awards a recognised university degree.

"This body," Mahfouz says, "is complementary to the national universities. For example, we have a Desert Agriculture Institute, an Electronic Engineering Institute, courses that are needed but not offered by the national universities."

It is a whirlwind tour of half a century's worth of intense activity. If he had to choose one field to which he might devote all his considerable energy, which would it be?

"Education," he says without hesitating. "Women's education, especially those of child bearing age, of which there are today some 4.5 millions. If I eradicate their illiteracy, and give them an education, not only have I created a more useful human being, but I am also creating 4.5 million new teachers."

So much done, and yet so little time. Surely a few regrets?

"Only one; the time wasted in not reading."

Profile by Mohamed Islam

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by Madame Sosostriis

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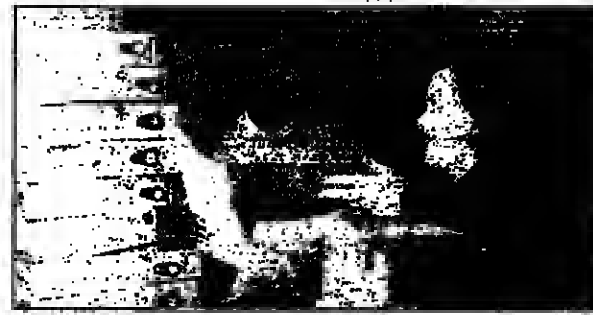


Donna Samiou and her group gives three performances with traditional songs from different regions of Greece

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only once. And you really do need to improve your listening powers if you want to enjoy the marvellous treat that the BBC World Service's 1996 African Drama Season has to offer over the next six weeks. Playwright and poet Nyil Osundare and producer-director Fiona Ledger suffered by going through almost one thousand entries for the Service's annual play writing competition, but we get to reap the fruit of their labour. Every week, starting today at 7pm, the winning entry will be aired for your listening pleasure, and you too can enjoy being on a municipal rubbish dump in Namibia in the comfort of your own homes as you listen to two additional plays from a separate category recorded on location using local actors. And as if that isn't enough, companion programmes to the plays, including in-depth interviews with the playwrights and actors will also be broadcast weekly, starting tomorrow.

♦ Out with the fast and in with the feast. There's nothing better than bingeing at sunset than binging all day long. But just before Ramadan came to an end, Rudolf Borgas, general manager of the Heliopolis Meridien, decided to perform his last charitable act of the month and treated the children at the Children Orphan Institute to a delicious *iftar*, followed by fun games.



Judges Nyil and Fiona — dreading the days ahead

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